TIME TO SAY 'JE SUIS DIVERSITY'

Global migration has introduced us to new communities and new religious practises. **Edwina Pio** asks how we can best reconcile them

How we handle the challenges of today will determine the future of our fragile planet and our humanity. Immigration is changing the composition and texture of workforces both nationally and globally.

The world contains over 5,000 ethno-cultural groups. Technology, cheap airfares and the global economy have scattered people in countless combinations around the planet and in organisations.

We need to move away from solitary identities that stereotype and put people and organisations into boxes. An individual may be a mother, sister, daughter, corporate lawyer, a Muslim, from Afghanistan and a New Zealand national.

Our corporate organisations need to ask some urgent questions: What if our actions were imbued with the sacred? What if activism in organisations evokes better local society and responsible global community? What if sacred activism signals the performance of a deeper understanding and mindful actions for organisations?

We need to understand were the sweet spot is in organisations as we scrutinise gateways of opportunity and pathways to success and influence. And yet organisations are reflections of the environment and so we have to look outside organisations to understand what is happening inside them.

Re-storying our relatedness may mean replacing a master narrative with multiple narratives, each of them true in a particular context and within a given set of circumstances, dependent on religion, geography, culture, migration history and economic prowess. In a planet which is so diverse perhaps the mantra that needs chanting is *Je suis diversity*.

Diversity is always politically charged and is a complex weave of historical and socio-economic legacies. These weaves affect the practices of organisational and societal life.

There are many approaches to viewing diversity, including ones that primarily focus on the negatives of diversity.

However, a positive approach to viewing diversity asks the following questions: What is the nature of opportunities minority groups have access to? How does diversity impact group performance in areas such as creativity?

This approach focuses on what makes individuals push towards optimal functioning within the context of five diversity megatrends within which religion is embedded.

Demographic patterns

Increasing global mobility and growth of "non-traditional" migrants in Western countries. Worldwide in 2013, international migrants were approximately 232 million, accounting for some 3.2% of the world's population.

Religious growth

Multiple religions diffuse historically religious monopolies and drive religious diversity. In 2014, Christians constituted 31.5%, Muslims 23.2%, Hindus 15.0%, Buddhists 7.1% and Jews 0.2% and in total account for roughly three-quarters of the world's population.

Corridors of Commerce

BRICS, Asia Pacific and halal areas are billion dollar markets.

Human Rights

Fusion of sacred and secular, accommodation and good faith requiring employers to accept religion and/or ethical observances as long as the practice does not unreasonably interfere with the business, guidelines on religious diversity in the workplace.

Whole self@work

Framing diversity in terms of relationships focuses attention on the nature of people's encounters with one another. These encounters are embedded in the history of societal relations between diverse groups, including the distribution of power, which shapes social roles, expectations and meanings at various group and individual levels.

The Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi reminds us: "Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment", which is the purpose of the following three conversation points.

5k

The world contains over 5,000 ethno-cultural groups scattered in countless combinations around the planet

3.2%

Worldwide in 2013, international migrants were approximately 232 million, accounting for some 3.2% of the world's population

CONVERSATION ONE

Help! I am inundated with diversity

Organisations can check their own religious data. What are some of the compelling questions which need to be asked? What kind of literature and discourse is available on diversity? Ask managers in organisations how do we co-create this knowledge?

Raising sociocultural awareness and consciousness can explode a skewed understanding of diversity. Governance changes can render organisations more beneficial to humanity and reduce the costs they inflict on humanity, where long-run consequences can dominate short-term benefits, where there is a willingness to transport wealth, imbibe knowledge and disseminate inclusive organisational practices through novel ideological constellations.

We want organisations to be diversity-sensitive in a holistic manner – we want both gateways (access) and pathways (career progression) – we want accountability at all levels, we want contribution at all levels.

CONVERSATION TWO

Exposure to tales of difference and circumventing religious phobia

Structural disadvantage resulting in a "shackled runner" is a powerful force to consider when investigating diversity and encourages the implementation of positive discrimination or the specific recognition of characteristics such as ethnicity, which may disadvantage a group through no direct fault of their own.

In seeking to side-step diversity penalties, a decision-making process that is premised on social justice and fairness can lead to transformative change.

Within countries across the European Union the Muslim population numbers around 20 million and represents 3.8% of the European Union's total population, making it the largest minority religious grouping in the region.

Over the next 15 years, Pew Research predicts that there will be about 58 million European Muslims. The significant population of Muslims in many countries in the West is also contributing to their economic, political and cultural influence, particularly in urban areas. Indeed, the usual negative images and stereotypes pertaining to Islam are in sharp contrast to its etymology, which means peace, and ignores Islam's cultural and ideological heterogeneity.

Recently there has been an enormous growth in the Islamic banking and finance industry and products in the West, providing Muslims and others with an opportunity to engage in interest-free transactions, which is consistent with the Islamic ethic of creating a world free from economic exploitation and disparities.

David Cameron, UK Prime Minister, announced in 2013 that the UK will issue a £200 million Islamic bond, or *sukuk*, making it the first non-Muslim country to tap into Islamic financing.

Organisations can eschew fundamentalism by paying attention to their religious minorities, reaping diversity dividends and making a difference by blessing our uncommon humanity.

20m

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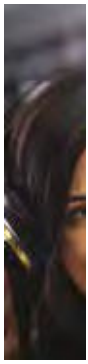
58m

Over the next 15 years there will be about 58 million European Muslims



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Religious radio stations have quadrupled over the past 25 years, while religious television shows increased fourfold

CONVERSATION THREE

In praise of an expanding circle of inclusiveness

The challenge before societies in an era of economic globalisation is the need to work towards a pluralistic and sustainable world order on principles that transcend the temporary goals of pure economic efficiency and expedient realpolitik.

The antidote to the short attention span of the global market oriented society is mindfulness to what is unique, specific and irreducible in human events and existence.

We need an inclusive, less arrogant and more attuned approach to social knowledge and action, including a global appreciation and respect for diversity.

Minorities, too, need to challenge the model of victimisation and stand tall and resilient, without arrogance or cleverness but with dignity, respect and know-how to negotiate the rivers of our lives.

Crafting policies, talent management, learning and development are key to expanding circles of inclusiveness. Inclusion in the workplace necessitates a discourse to integrate multiple voices. Diversity has to be constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed. *Je suis diversity* seeks recognition and depends on social relations and acknowledgement.

Global migration has ensured that organisations have a rich base of potential employees to select from and to promote. Migration has also clearly complicated simple divisions such as work and religion, private and public, the sacred and secular.

> *Diversity has to be constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed. Je suis diversity seeks recognition and depends on social relations and acknowledgement*

Yet such migrant complications also mean access to multifarious worlds, markets, technologies and knowledge bases. Religious radio stations have quadrupled over the past 25 years, while religious television shows increased fourfold. Corporate chaplains, who number in the thousands, represent a booming industry and careers related to spirituality and counselling in the workplace continue to gain in importance.

The diaspora tends to unsettle existing stasis in organisation and urges the need for multiple voices to be acknowledged. A special issue of *The Economist* (2011) focused on the diaspora phenomenon highlighted how migrant business networks are reshaping the world by providing not only financial investments but also the critical managerial and technical skills needed for economic development.

In a woven universe we are all intimately linked, we are called to be future makers through respectful reciprocal relationships.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edwina Pio is New Zealand's first Professor of Diversity. She teaches at the Business & Law School of the Auckland University of Technology. A Fulbright alumnus, she is Research Leader of the Immigration and Inclusion Group, Co-director of the Global Centre for Equality and Human Rights and Associate Director of the New Zealand India Research Institute.