

How Can I Learn More:(Activity/Thing to do)

2. Recruitment and the wearing of religious symbols in the telephony sector

Analysis of real-life situations

- A telephone company centralises its remote intervention and reception services in a *call centre* that users can contact to obtain information, make a complaint, receive advice or make an appointment with a department.
- The *call centre* team, supported by high-performance IT systems, is capable of handling both routine requests (administrative issues and information updates) and more technical requests (use of equipment). This means that a lower-skilled workforce can be employed, with more qualified staff concentrating on more complex requests (guidance in the event of breakdowns, etc.).
- Human resources are managed in-house.
- The recruitment process is based on selection criteria in line with the skills required: call handling, analysis of customer requirements, product knowledge, basic technical knowledge, clear elocution, empathy, stress management, autonomy, spelling (online written communication), multilingual skills.
- The selection of candidates consists of a written part with a multiple-choice questionnaire and dictated information to be encoded in a file in a given time.
- The first phase is followed by a one-to-one interview with the human resources manager and a role-play session in which candidates are asked to handle a call from a dissatisfied customer, in order to assess their commercial skills and call handling according to defined criteria.
- The staff is fairly diverse, in terms of age (young and old), gender and national origin.
- This sometimes requires adaptations: training to remedy shortcomings and gaps detected, more intensive monitoring or coaching for some, variable working hours with the possibility of choice depending on personal constraints (pregnancy, religion, illness, family circumstances, etc.).

Definition of the problem

- Despite the stress of the job, the atmosphere is good and employees are not shy about inviting their acquaintances to apply.
- Leila was invited there by a friend, and she loves being in contact with people and is very sociable.
- This is a person with great self-control who is good at analysing a technical situation and formulating advice. Her previous experience in commercial roles (selling mobile phones) has given her a taste for customer service.
- She sees a job in this *call centre* as an interesting opportunity, which will enable her to put her skills to good use while joining an organisation where she can develop.
- She passed the first selection stage.

- During the interview with the human resources manager, she wears a *hijab* that covers her hair and neck. Leila's excellent elocution and commercial experience are much appreciated, and she speaks fluent English and Arabic.
- However, she deplores the fact that she insists on wearing a headscarf: "*It's retrograde and against gender equality*", she says.
- The organisation's internal rules also stipulate that the wearing of any distinctive religious symbol is prohibited in the company.
- As her skills and motivation to join the team were in no doubt, she was called for a second interview, during which she was asked to give up her headscarf in favour of a bandana, which would allow her to cover her head in a way that made less reference to a religious practice and was more in line with the organisation's internal rules.
- Leila refused, saying it was "*beyond her strength*" and contrary to her religious principles. Her application was definitively rejected.

Test Yourself:

Let's think about the case

1. What do you think of Leila's attitude and that of the head of recruitment?
2. Do you think Leila's wearing of the veil could affect her relationship with her colleagues?
3. Should service neutrality apply to this *call centre*? In what form? Doesn't this situation reinforce the rejection of applications from veiled Muslim women, as opposed to Muslim men who do not wear outward signs of religion?
4. Does the absence of visual contact with customers influence the ban on religious symbols?
5. If you hire Leila, how will you manage her integration into the team?
6. What do you think of the proposal to replace the headscarf with a bandana?
7. What would you suggest to Leila to help her find a job that matches her skills?

Cross-cutting issues

1. What similarities do you see between the situations presented in our series and those in the Muslim religion?
2. What are the differences between these various cases?
3. What conclusions do you draw from this to inform your actions when faced with this type of problem?

Reread your spontaneous answers from the beginning of Part 3 "Religion invites itself into the workplace!"

1. What are the similarities between your spontaneous answers and the case developments?
2. What are the differences between your initial position and the proposed solutions described?
3. What are the reasons for these differences?
4. After completing the practical exercises, would you like to change your initial proposal?
5. If so, in which direction?

6. If not, why not?

What about your company?

1. Do you experience situations similar to those analysed above in your own company? Please elaborate.
2. Do the cases and theory presented inspire you in dealing with your company's difficulties? If so, in what way?
3. If not, why not? How are your needs different?
4. And what resources are you able to invest to meet your needs?
5. How do you intend to respond to the difficulties within your company relating to the expression of the Islamic religion, given your resources?
6. Have you already started working in this direction?
7. If so, how?
8. What results do you get?
9. How do you measure these results?
10. Are they satisfactory? Encouraging?
11. Which way should you go?
12. If you haven't yet taken any concrete steps to address the problem you've identified, why not?
13. What do you need to take action? And how do you get it?

Conclusion

How to deal with intercultural tensions in the workplace

Mediation is a specific action taken on a case-by-case basis

- Adapt any response to the specific nature of the situation envisaged.
- Each company has its own dynamic.
- The same applies to the individuals who make it up.
- It is this heterogeneity that makes mediation relevant.
- The mediation process requires flexibility and adjustment in order to reach a consensus between the parties.
- Capitalising on and sharing experience in this field with *others*.

A proactive strategy

- The reluctance of companies to deal with diversity issues means that the benefits of inclusion cannot be maximised.
- By dodging these questions, they leave themselves no choice but to decide blindly when a conflict arises.
- This non-strategy contributes to the creation of avoidable dysfunctions.
- The absence of a framework encourages the emergence of informal practices that contribute to breaking company rules, as can be seen in the examples analysed.

- Denial invites arbitrariness and can be detrimental to the company's development.
- That's why proactive, forward-looking, long-term strategies seem to be so effective.
- *It's a question of anticipating and establishing a preventive approach to tensions, but also an approach that enhances diversity; these two dimensions feed off each other.*
- There are many [guides for business managers](#) to help them make the right decisions. Don't hesitate to have a look.
- These publications (most of which are summaries and freely available online, produced by [human resources management companies](#)) provide information on legal benchmarks, team support and training techniques, diversity diagnosis and plans, and the structures that can help you.

Always dialogue!

- In this concert of practices, mediation is a conflict prevention and management tool.
- It takes the form of an effort to engage in dialogue and reflects a consensual style of governance based on consultation and concertation with all the driving forces of the company.
- *Dialogue is a form of internal communication within the company and can restore exchange where it has been weakened (listening, reformulation, etc.), as well as building trust between the parties (empathy, solidarity, etc.).*
- *It aims at cooperation and the search for a community of interests between parties, beyond the asymmetrical relationships between workers, decision-makers, etc., in order to move from competitive relationships to collaborative ones.*

Trust between parties

- Mediation also aims to (re)build a sense of shared trust within the company.
- Confidence and well-being at work are necessary for commitment, investment and change.
- Without these elements, it is impossible to move from competitiveness to cooperation.
- There are different types of trust: intercultural mediation is particularly interested in "identity" trust, which concerns our origins, our cultures, our values, the visions we have of each other...
- It is based on a complex set of feelings and on the establishment of recognition for everyone, as well as dialogue between everyone.

Decentralisation

- Decentring is another necessary posture in mediation.
- It's about being able to understand our own sensitive areas.
- And to identify the important values of others.
- This is how we can avoid projecting our own feelings or fears onto others.
- Decentring does not mean denying one's values, but rather not judging those of others.
- It means learning about others, but without judgement and without pretending to become an "expert" or to over-essentialise or over-generalise what is learned.
- Under no circumstances is it a question of accepting inappropriate behaviour within a team.
- Nor do we abandon the imperatives of safety, efficiency and justice.
- It's just about reducing the amount of arbitrariness in our decision-making, our choices and our communication.

- It's based on exchange and consultation.

Including witnesses helps mediation

- Certain sensitive or complex subjects can make mediation difficult: religion, fundamental rights, technology... We're not specialists in these areas!
- Think about involving external experts in your approach, who can be recognised by the stakeholders (a religious figure, an engineer from an immigrant background, etc.).
- It also means making the most of the internal expertise of the parties involved, in an alternating way: internal "experts", then external ones, specialists from one side, then from the other, etc.: always seeking a balance. Always looking for a balance.

The last word

- Intercultural intervention in companies appears to be a complementary approach to legislation and trade union consultation.
- It is light, flexible and innovative, making it easier to communicate in a conflict context.
- It can make it more effective to build quality "working together".
- But also to enhance well-being in the workplace, beyond the "feeling of being recognised" for everyone.
- *In the end*, there will be inclusion effects on the job market...
- Mediation is therefore not only part of a social logic, but also an economic one: it also contributes to a company's efficiency and its public image ([VIDEO](#)).