# THE COMPLEX NATURE OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN THE TECHNICAL WORKPLACE

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**Abstract**

*Many organizations are driven by technology. If you consider the nature of workforce shortages in areas like cybersecurity, it is important to understand how organizations not only need to consider diverse talent but also the unique perspectives and dynamics that having this diversity can bring to the workplace around gender, race, and most of all diverse religions. There have been several incidents in the United States that point to significant problems with religious incivility in the workplace. In 2016 when the company, Chargrill, fired 150 non-Christian workers over prayer breaks. The incident points to a growing challenge in the American workplace about what companies can do to accommodate their employees' faiths. The method of paper provides an exploration of how incivility and religious intolerance in the workplace can create a climate for devalued groups in technical and all workplaces through current and relevant literature. There is a significant amount of literature on religious conflict and incivility in a global since there needs to be more exploration on how religious conflict and incivility manifests itself through everyday interactions in the workplace. This article explores the nature of this issue from a review of literature and practical real-world business constructs in ways that advocate for education, cultural competence, tolerance, and interfaith dialog in the workplace for all managers and all employees.*

*Keywords: Religious literacy, Workplace incivility, Diversity and inclusion, Religious conflict, Leadership engagement*

## INTRODUCTION

The global cybersecurity workforce will have more than 1.5 million unfilled positions by 2020. To meet this gap progressive organizations are considering employees from different backgrounds, experiences, and career trajectories (Burrell & Nobles, 2018). Meeting the demand includes recruiting and hiring citizens that immigrants and from different cultures. It is important to understand how organizations not only need to consider diverse talent but also the unique perspectives and dynamics that that diversity can bring to the workplace around gender, race, and diverse religions (Burrell et al., 2009). U.S. workplace religious incivility and discrimination is often driven by a lack of understanding and intolerance in ways to can devalue those of minority faiths like Seventh-day Adventists, Jews and Sikhs (Moodie, 2016).

Several public incidents highlight how conflict around religion has created a breeding ground for incivility, profiling, hate and devaluing others that can bleed into the workplace, especially technical organizations looking to bring new groups of employees to the workplace that have existed in small quantities. A 2016 United States presidential proposal to bar foreign Muslims from entering the country has had a polarizing impact on those who are Muslim American citizens. An August 2017 protest in Charlottesville, VA, USA included marginalizing chants of "Jews will not replace us." The year 2017 represented the largest one-year increase of anti-Semitic incidents in U.S. history. Regardless of one's political affinity, public debates and confrontations can have rippling effects beyond political discourse when one considers that these debates can represent employee beliefs related to religion that can lead to incivility and dehumanizing encounters in the workplace that hamper workplace productivity, employee commitment, and the accomplishment of organizational goals.

**The research objective** of this paper is to provide on contextual review of the literature and current events to provide conceptual and practical solutions to how technical organizations and cybersecurity operations can proactively solve employee conflict and workplace incivility around religion.

**The tasks** include using current events and contexts around religious incivility to explore the complexity and challenges of religious illiteracy in the technical workplace.

**The research methods** include exploration of the significant literature around the areas of organizational development, conflict management, interfaith action, and conflict management to better understand the impacts on individuals and the organization concerning religious incivility.

**The research results** indicate a need for managerial awareness and organizational focus around the impact of religious intolerance and religious diversity in technical workplaces especially as the U.S. becomes more diverse and focuses on the recruitment of cybersecurity talent from other countries, cultures, origins, and ethnicities to meet the workforce shortages. Many of these workers will be non-Christians.

## BACKGROUND

Members of a religion do not always represent a monolithic group in terms of being in total lockstep with identical beliefs, behaviors, and viewpoints. Often the public narrative in the US is that Muslims who commit violence are considered as being the norm among Muslims; whereas Christians who commit violence are treated as individuals.

For example, members of ISIS consider themselves to be Muslims and members of the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) consider themselves to be Christians. Pointing this double standard out is not intended to favor one religious group over another. The intent is to provide a platform for discussion around the potential reasons why and the implications around those reasons. In 2014, a Virginia leader of the KKK classified the organization as a non-violent Christian organization and stated that he considered it a falsehood that the KKK is a violent organization (Ashtari, 2015). KKK members have crosses on their robes, burn crosses to terrorize others, have fire bombed African-American churches, and have a history of bringing bibles to attacks that have harmed and murder men, women, and children. The KKK has a historical history of terrorizing, threatening, torturing and killing people of color and those of Jewish faith. Yet Christians are not being questioned by politicians or co-workers, and no public figure has proposed that they be banned for their faith. All Christians are not being asked to carry the burden of the behaviors of the members the KKK and yet those of other faiths are not given that same courtesy. These same conflicting missing mutual courtesies and negative pubic narratives can manifest themselves in workplace discussions, interactions, and dialogs. These issues create a thorny landscape for conflict and a new normal for organizational leaders who are attempting to bring new and diverse groups of employees to technical departments and organizations.

According to Rahim (2010), this characterization of a group of people based on assumptions, personal or social opinions, religious perspectives, isolated behaviors, or any other unfounded evidence can be very harmful and damaging to the person, the group, and (with respect to this research) even community agencies.

Obviously, the U.S. population, which includes leadership employees at all levels of organizations, is concerned about safety and terrorism. However, the narrative that justifies

profiling and prejudice about who is a real threat is often in conflict with to the actual backgrounds and religions of those that have engaged in mass shootings and domestic terrorism in the US.

Consider how it might impact an organization if employees were to be profiled and reacted to because of their religion. False assumptions around religion perpetuates double standards about who is a real threat and who is an imaginary one based on prejudice (Malik, 2012). Perhaps the clearest examples of this manifestation include the religious, racial, cultural, and ethnic demographics of those who have actively engaged in mass terrorist attacks against Americans in the U.S. have often had other religious backgrounds then being Muslim. The evidence of this include the race and religious backgrounds of those who perpetrated the mass shooting of nine African-American church attendees by Dylan Roof in South Carolina; the mass shooting at Parkland High in Florida; the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary; the mass shooting in Las Vegas; and the Oklahoma City federal building bombing. To many families and communities, the Oklahoma City terror attack is just as devastating at the terror attack of September 11, 2001 (9/11) and yet Christian White males, like the Timothy McVey, who are often the perpetrators mass shootings and violent encounters are not religiously and racially profiled to the manner of other religious and ethnic groups.

A lack of understanding and literacy of those of different religions today's workplace encompasses an uncivil and devaluing social construction of race and religion with a conflicting capacity for a negative public narrative of "what Muslims are" and "who they are," according to a characterization of non-Christians (Malik, 2012). This portrayal often paints them with a broad brush in ways that breed incivility, bias, and prejudice (Malik, 2012).

**RESEARCH IN THE LITERATURE AROUND RELIGIOUS INCIVILITY**

The figures below are pictures of real bumper stickers seen on vehicles in the parking lots of two organizations in Virginia and North Carolina, USA:

Figure 1. - Refers to a confrontational gun fight reference between two groups

Figure 2. - Refers to the Anti-Sematic comments the Mel Gibson made about Jewish people



Imagine how a Muslim or Jewish employee would feel if they entered their company's parking lot and saw one of these bumper stickers on a co-worker's car. Consider the incivility that has the potential to occur to when employees engage co-workers with offensive jokes and hurtful statements in the workplace around a person's religion. Anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S increased almost 60 percent in 2017 which is the largest increase of any year to date (Shugerman, 2018). According to the Anti-Defamation League, bomb threats against Jewish institutions have increased 41% in one year (Abramson, 2018). In 2012, a gunman shot five Sikh worshipers because of assumptions about their religion (Anderson, 2017). The Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reports that since 2001, more than 20% of the EEO complaints were connected to religious discrimination. It annually investigates bias against Muslims, even though they only make up less than 2 percent of the U.S. population (U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018). These public incidents manifest themselves in the workplace in several ways that require leaders at all levels to mandate new training and new areas of knowledge, and new ways of engagement to mitigate negative outcomes.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals based on religion (or lack of religious belief) in hiring, firing, or with regards to any other terms and conditions of employment (U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018). The law also prohibits job-differential, adverse treatment specifically based on religion, such as removing an employee from a customer contact position because they wear a turban or another outward indicator of religious faith. In addition, Title VII requires employers to reasonably accommodate the religious beliefs and practices of applicants and employees unless doing so would cause more than a minimal hardship on the operation of the employer's business (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018). A reasonable religious accommodation is any adjustment to the work environment that will allow the employee to practice his/her religion (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018).

Religious discrimination allegations at the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Charges filed under Title VII were 3,825 in the 2016 fiscal year up from 3,502 in the 2015 fiscal year. There has been more than a 50% increase in cases filed with the EEOC

from 2006 to 2016 (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018). These EEOC cases include the following examples:

1. In 2014, Rizza Cadillac resolved a case brought forward by three employees in the sales department who claimed that they were referred to as "sand nigger, terrorist, and Hezbollah because they were Muslim and Arab" (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018).

2. In 2013 Tri County Lexus settled a religious discrimination case where a Sikh applicant was not offered a sales job and was denied the reasonable accommodation of wearing a beard because of his religion (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018).

3. In 2012, AutoZone settled a case against a Sikh employee who was harassed and who had been denied the reasonable accommodation of wearing a turban in his sales position (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018).

All of these cases demonstrate the complex nature of managing and leading employees of diverse religions in the workplace in a reality in which most mandatory organizational diversity training fails to properly inform, or expose leaders (at all levels) to, interfaith education and religious literacy (Burrell et al., 2009). Problematic for leaders in the workplace is how employees can develop false assumptions that can create uncivil and prejudicial interactions with others of different backgrounds and faiths (Steinberg, 2001).

Carbo (2009) outlines that the laws to protect targets against incivility and bullying are in an "infancy" stage and that "the focus of the US law on discrimination rather than dignity and judicial interpretations of the elements of workplace harassment eliminate the majority of bullying claims from any type of legal protection" (p. 3). He suggested that future research understand motivations for incivility and bullying beyond legal responses and remedies as the only options for resolution in the United States. He encourages future inquiry around the use of alternative dispute resolution, restorative justice practices, and other conflict resolution approaches. Even though federal and state laws exist to protect employees, the employer is responsible for creating strategies, having discussions, and displaying policies to control the actions of their employees to lessen bullying behavior (Zeka, 2018; Carbo, 2009).

## INCIVILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Generally, preparation and flexibility are critical in terms of managing differences in the workplace. The best approaches would usually allow for the parties' involvement and perspectives, as well as consider their greatest point of resistance (Wisinski, 1993). Wisinski (1993) points to conflict as something normal and natural. It is viewed as a manageable and resolvable interpersonal dynamic with potentially creative results (p. 1). Conversely, what

appears to be counterproductive and the incubator of incivility is the avoidance of workplace conflict altogether (Wisinski, 1993).

Bullying is a behavior described using various concepts and terms such as harassment, mobbing, victimization, and incivility (Gantt-Grace, 2016). Even though the names are different, all these terms refer to the same process namely, the systematic mistreatment of a co-worker (Gantt-Grace, 2016). Oade (2009) captured workplace incivility using the following key elements:

1. A personalized, repeated attack from one employee by another employee exercising behaviors that are emotionally and psychologically punishing.

2. Introducing a dynamic into a workplace relationship which involves a purposed attempt by one employee to harm another employee's self-confidence, self-worth, and character or to determine their ability to perform their work duties effectively.

3. The degree to which the person exercising the bullying behavior chooses to handle their relationship with an employee in a way that involves removing power from their employee and placing it with themselves.

Workplace incivility is defined as "rude, condescending, and ostracizing acts that violate workplace norms of respect, but otherwise appear mundane. Organizations sometimes dismiss routine slights and indignities which lack overt malice as inconsequential," (Cortina et. al, 2017). Workers

MacFadden (2010) noted that it is "estimated that employees who are victims of bullying and incivility spend between 10% and 52% of their time at work dealing with its effects." These effects include everything from defending themselves, feeling harassed, experiencing stress, seeking counseling, or consistent workplace absenteeism (Jaramillo, 2017; Febber, 2018). In addition, these effects can become the origins of developing health problems, depression, and even suicide (Jaramillo, 2017; Febber, 2018).

Research outlines that workplace incivility and bullying spurs various health conditions (Djurkovic, McCormack, & Casimir, 2004). Targets and onlookers of workplace incivility suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), not only from undergoing the abrasive conduct but also because they often experience sensations of isolation and marginalization by the incivility (Zeka, 2018; Jaramillo, 2017; Febber, 2018).

When people experience incivility, harassing, and bullying behaviors in the workplace, they can respond in many ways (Febber, 2018). Victims' response to bullying has been interpreted based on how the victims cope with the behavior (Febber, 2018). Febber (2018) noted that some behavior responses include assertiveness, avoidance, and seeking help. Un-

attending to the behavior can cause both physical and psychological damage to the victims' health (Febber, 2018).

Targets of incivility often experience a plethora of feelings including hyper-vigilance, fatigue, persistent anger, fearfulness, anxiety, and loss of sleep Jaramillo, 2017; Febber, 2018). In addition, targets of incivility are known to claim more sick time than workers who are not experiencing the off-putting behavior (Zeka, 2018; Jaramillo, 2017; Febber, 2018). Physical symptoms such as stomach ailments are other health related consequences caused by bullying and incivility in the workplace often include anxiety and depression (Zeka, 2018; Jaramillo, 2017; Febber, 2018). Employees that experience religious incivility can also experience the same kinds of feeling.

Febber (2018) noted that some victims of workplace incivility, prejudice, bullying, and microaggressions experience post-traumatic stress disorder that may persist for extended periods of time in the form of interpersonal pain. Interpersonal pain related to workplace bullying has been compared to physical pain. Dzurec and Bromley (2012) noted that interpersonal pain, like physical pain causes stress, intense trepidation, and anguish. Like physical pain, interpersonal pain resulting from undesirable exchanges and interactions with others can hinder workplace communication, trust, collaboration and productivity (Dzurec & Bromley, 2012). Febber (2018) and Zeka (2018) discussed humans as social beings and summarized numerous studies documenting neural overlap between social and physical pain. Similar to individuals suffering from pain related to physical conditions, victims of workplace bullying may experience social interactions that are truly and deeply painful (Febber, 2018). Their perceptions incivility, prejudice, and intolerance on the part of coworkers might become a source of perceived physical pain (Febber, 2018)

Workplace incivility impacts more than just victims (Febber, 2018). Eyewitnesses of incivility, harassment, and microaggressions are not neutral spectators and also can be affected by the experience of observing and about these incidents (Zeka, 2018). Anxiety of retribution can often result in under-reporting or not reporting interaction episodes of incivility and harassment (Franklin & Chadwick, 2013). Those wounded may be afraid to oppose their aggressors due to reprisal (Febber, 2018; Zeka, 2018). A lack of confrontation can create climate where harassing behavior is accepted and tolerated in a manner that allows the behavior to continue and even germinate to others copying the bulling behavior (Zeka, 2018).

In the literature harassment and incivility have all been characterized as intentional, aggressive behavior designed to intimidate, harass, and exclude through name calling, dismissive behaviors, threats, and offensive joking (Gant-Grace, 2016; Zeka, 2018). The effects of this behaviors on the victim may mirror the idea of a psychological loss, such as the loss of

self-esteem and hope (Febber, 2018; Gant-Grace, 2016; Zeka, 2018). Consider how this manifest itself those who are targets but feel their sense of faith and religion is such an important aspect of who they are.

## COSTS OF INCIVILITY TO THE ORGANIZATION

Workplace incivility, harassment, and bullying affects not only individuals but also organizations (Zeka, 2018; Jaramillo, 2017). Organizations can incur direct cost such as paid sick leave, absenteeism, employee turnover, lost productivity, the increased use of employee assistance plans as a result of employees being targeted (Jaramillo, 2017). Additionally, organizations can incur more subtle costs linked with overtime and weakening of the workplace climate and atmosphere (Zeka, 2018; Jaramillo, 2017).

It is hard to change the minds and behaviors of people engage in racist, prejudiced, and uncivil behavior if leaders cannot change the organizational culture that supports or breeds the created mind-set (Milloy, 2018). Success often requires cultural changes before the behaviors of people can change (Milloy, 2018).

These behaviors can manifest in the way that employees engage each other in the workplace and can require an advanced level of leadership skills and training to minimize the potential damage. That damage can be as severe as lawsuits or employee turnover and can also result in employees being marginalized and bullied which can consequently result in their becoming disengaged (Burrell et al., 2009; Burrell, 2015).

Whether acknowledged or ignored, these cultural and religious considerations have not only changed how employees should be treated and managed, but these considerations have also caused a complex cultural evolution of the workplace itself (Burrell et al., 2009; Burrell, 2015). While many might believe that having open and public religious activities and viewpoints is appropriate in the workplace, the growth of religious and cultural diversity in America has changed the nature of managing, employee engagement, and training in the workplace (Burrell et al., 2009; Burrell, 2015).

The inclusive workplace is guided by a set of values that drive its policies and practices (Burrell et al., 2009). Using an ecosystems perspective, these values pertain to varying organizational levels, from the micro to the macro level (Rahim, 2010). An organization's actions, like a person's behavior, are informed by its values, whether explicit or implicit (Rahim, 2010; Burrell, 2015). Leadership diversity training and related conversations traditionally have historically had a strong focus specifically on gender, race, and ethnicity (Burrell et al., 2009). However, diversity has evolved today to include and address other dimensions of difference (Burrell et al., 2009; Burrell, 2015). These evolving components of diversity and difference include

challenges to traditional viewpoints about marriage; discussions about the nature of gender identity; and public confrontations of the structures and systems that hinder the inclusivity of multidimensional identities, including religious beliefs or other ideologies (Burrell et al., 2009).

Traditionally, the American leadership approach to diversity has been for people of different races, colors, and religions to assimilate into homogeneous American customs, values, and religions (Burrell et al., 2009). Historically, immigrants and minorities were expected to deemphasize their own cultural, religious, and language familiarities so that they fit in; and this burden of change was always placed on them to assimilate (Burrell et al., 2009). This carried over to the workplace, where organizations historically expected those subordinates who were different to bear the burden of adjusting or attempting to camouflage those things about them that were different culturally, racially, and religiously to fit in (Burrell et al., 2009; Hubbard, 2008). The approach was that cultural assimilation was the process that best ensured cohesiveness because without it, there would be organizational incongruence (Thomas, 1991). The diversity problems related to many religions in the workplace are not caused by the changing composition of the work force itself, but rather by the inability of work organizations to truly integrate and use a heterogeneous work force at all levels of the organization (Burrell, 2015; Burrell et al., 2009).

The challenge of having to conceal important aspects of your culture, background and religion in order blend in. The result is often people living a divided life (Palmer, 2008). One where people feel forced to ignore or defy one's values over the need to fit in and be accepted (Palmer, 2008). Consider a workplace where an employee feels the need to hide their religion to avoid bullying, hurtful jokes, or discrimination.

Research by the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) found that "Religious and spiritual diversity should not be just about human resource policies and practices. An organization's ability to recognize, embrace, and function in a religious and spiritually diverse world is critical to its sustainability strategy" (Society for Human Resources Management, 2008). This means that organizations that are not inclusive, flexible, and respectful to those of diverse religious and spiritual values could potentially have employee turnover issues, religious discrimination lawsuits, and disengaged employees, all of which could negatively influence organizational productivity and organizational results (Sumner, 2018).

This is a monumental challenge, as performance excellence depends on the organization's ability to direct employee behavior toward collective goals. This requires the ability to create a safe and inclusive place where individuals of diverse backgrounds, cultures, genders, races, and religions are valued and respected (Burrell, 2015). These challenges have forced organizations to seek and develop leaders with higher levels of awareness,

comprehension, knowledge, and sensitivity concerning the importance and value of diversity (Burrell, 2015; Hubbard, 2008). Fry and Egel (2017) state that an organization's ability to grow, survive, and compete in a competitive environment is often dependent on how organizations develop a learning and developmental culture that can adapt to change.

Eilertsen (2017) states today that progressive and forward-thinking organizations focus on creating organizational cultures where all employees feel their opinions, experiences, and viewpoints are valued and respected. To do so requires a huge shift in how organizations honor, value, and support the diverse experiences and backgrounds of their employees (Eilertsen, 2017).

Discrimination and racist incivility can be explored and understood by looking at the historical contexts of oppression, privilege, bias, and prejudice that create structures and systems that allow it to continue (Burrell, 2015).  It takes a broader and more enlightened view for organizational leaders to address devaluing and dehumanizing things like incivility, microaggressions, discrimination, and racism (Burrell, 2015). In order to challenge the kind of interactions and behaviors that can devalue others organizational leaders need to authentically comprehend the challenging dimensions of racism, bias, and discrimination in order to eliminate organizational cultures, structures and systems that can breed and uncheck dehumanizing, uncivil, racist, and discriminatory behavior (Burrell, 2015). The Burrell Racism, Incivility, and Discrimination model (2018) provides a context of these complex dimensions which include:

1. Internal-How we have been socialized to think and believe about others who might be different.
2. Interpersonal- How we have consciously or unconsciously condition ourselves to act towards others who might be different.
3. Institutional- What are the systems, structures, policies, and processes that support inequities or that fail to address inequities that dehumanize, marginalize, dismiss, and devalue others.
4. Cultural- What the privileges and perspectives of the dominant culture that might force others to diminish, abandon, and suppress some of the most important aspects of the cultures of others.

Most people understand discrimination, incivility, and racism on the first two levels and often fail to understand and acknowledge the comprehensive and interconnected aspects of how all of them can impact others.

## CONCLUSIONS IN THE LITERATURE

Senior executives, managers, and leaders at every level that are open to gaining full those levels understand the importance of constructive organizational cultural change (Burrell, 2015).

The importance of focusing on building positive relationships, trust, and appropriate communication skills in interfaith, interreligious, and intercultural dialogue is critical in managing incivility and conflict. (Shafiz and Abu-Nimer, 2011) . Developing literacy and understanding of those from diverse religions is a critical aspect of building effective interfaith dialog and respect (Patel, 2016). When considering interfaith dialog and respect, Shafiq and Abu-Nimer (2011) state that those who might be fearful of interfaith dialogue may view such a dialogue as being "an act of disbelief in their own religion" (p. 14). Religious literacy and interfaith dialog in the workplace in not about placing employees in situations where they themselves may feel as if they are being required to disbelieve in their religion. Shafiq and Abu-Nimer (2011) outline that interfaith dialogue is not meant to unify religions, but rather to educate and engage those of different faiths in a curious but constructive manner. It assumes that participants do not have to abandon their own religion to fully become immersed in the comprehension of, and in learning about, others' religions (Shafiz and Abu-Nimer, 2011).

According Shafiq and Abu-Nimer (2011), the purposes of interfaith dialogue are to struggle against negative conditioning and fanaticism and to open the door for listening, communication, and respect. Interfaith dialogue means holding on to one's own faith while simultaneously trying to understand another person's faith (Patel, 2016). It demands honesty and respect from its participants, so that all individuals may present their religions sincerely without being devalued (Patel, 2016). Uniformity and agreement are not the goals; rather, the intent is to use collaboration to educate in ways that allow people to better understand, respect, and appreciate the tenants, customs of those of diverse religions that could be similar to your own or diverse from your own (Abu-Nimer, 2011). The result is that well-intentioned and constructive civil engagement creates a fertile ground for understanding that is based on truths instead of stereotypes, inaccuracies, negative sensationalism, and discriminatory profiling (Patel, 2016).

This new area of engaging employees requires leaders to move beyond tolerance to embrasure and inclusion of those of diverse and minority religions (Burrell et al., 2009). This is because striving for toleration may, in fact, have undesirable consequences. Something that is tolerated is usually something one finds unsatisfactory (Niebuhr, 2008). To "tolerate" means to endure, to suffer or to put up with a person, activity, idea or organization of which or whom one does not approve (Niebuhr, 2008). Thus, to advocate just for tolerance may result not in intergroup understanding but, rather, may sanction group isolation, breed intergroup resentment and result in a certain type of paralysis (Niebuhr, 2008). When groups are tolerated, there is no need to go beyond toleration to respect because there is no requirement of understanding on a level to promote equity and inclusion (Niebuhr, 2008).

A driving force behind workplaces that are inclusive and support diverse religious civility is the concept of religious literacy (Burrell et al., 2009). On a superficial level, religious literacy is similar to cultural competence in that it is about having a level of respect for those whose practices are different than one's own (Patel, 2016). This respect for others who are different, and practice different faiths, is important for understanding diverse religions in an accurate and truthful sense (Patel, 2016). Patel (2016) explains that structured and facilitated engagement and discussions can be a useful approach for deeper moral consensus in ways that perpetuate the likelihood of collaboration and respectful engagement over that of uncivil, prejudiced, and devaluing interactions.

Inclusion promotes differences in thinking and perspectives, enabling organizations to discover new vectors for problem solving, which have a dramatic impact on operational successes (Burrell & Nobles, 2018).  Research indicates that diverse employee groups with diverse professional experiences, levels of education, and expertise are more advantageous than a homogeneous group at solving complex, emergent problems (Burrell & Nobles, 2018). People with different backgrounds provide different perspectives, ideas, and approaches. Diversity can enhance organizational knowledge and develop new tactics by adding to an organization's intellectual capacity and technical expertise (Burrell & Nobles, 2018).

The use of the Darrell Norman Burrell Interfaith and Religious Diversity and Inclusion (DNBIFI) Model (2016), which provides a developed framework that itself provides a roadmap for promoting constructive dialog and engagement.

Figure 3. DNBIFI Model (2016)
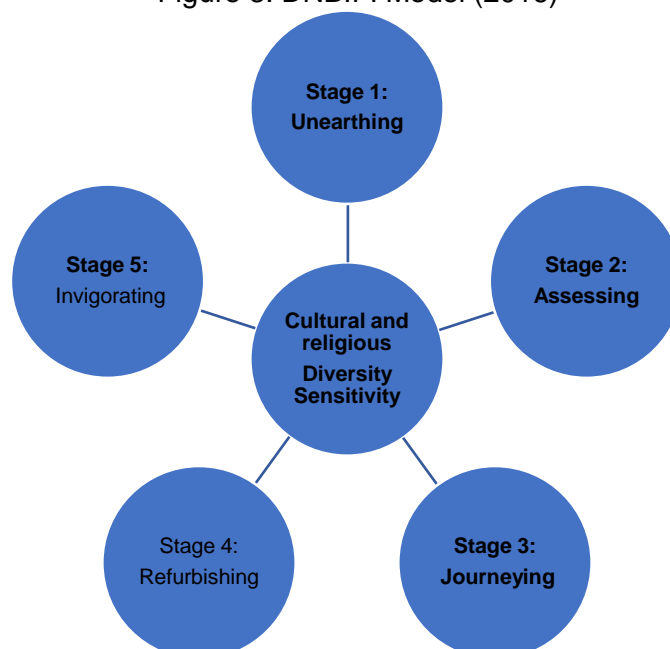
Darrell Norman Burrell Interfaith and Religious Diversity and Inclusion (DNBIFI) Model (2016):

*Unearthing*

"Unearthing" in this model, represents the creation of forums and mechanisms for awareness; understanding; and the appreciation of international, cultural, religious values, similarities, differences, strengths, and stereotypes.

*Assessing*

"Assessing" in this model is a systematic survey of the organizational culture and climate as it relates to international, cultural, and religious diversity including the sharing of those results and perspectives throughout the organization.

*Journeying*

"Journeying" in this model represents the use of activities and interactive workshops to allow employees with diverse backgrounds to communicate, share life-changing experiences, and get to know each other socially and culturally in ways that might not occur in the normal work environment. These interactions allow employees to understand the kinds of behaviors that are present on an organizational scale and move from denial of differences, conflict, and tensions towards the appreciation and celebration of employee differences.

*Refurbishing*

"Refurbishing" in this model represents how the use of the earlier steps encouraged and fostered by leadership begins to influence the organizational culture and the perspectives of employees, doing so through the intervention of new organizational practices creating an organizational climate that celebrates international, cultural, and religious diversity.

*Invigorating*

"Invigorating" in this model represents how the expansion of ethnic diversity initiatives allows for a culture that celebrates differences one where employees are encouraged to share stories about their diverse background instead of attempting to hide or minimize their international, cultural, and religious origins out of fear of being ostracized or isolated. Activities that demonstrate how employees value diversity are made part of employee performance evaluations. Positive agents for diversity are acknowledged and rewarded for their support of diversity in the organizational culture.

The model outlines a critical aspect of the organizations that are committed to having a welcoming organization that free from harassment, prejudice, and incivility. Having the right structure in place is critical for technical organizations and departments that are committed to hiring, developing, and promoting employees from diverse backgrounds to meet their workforce challenges. Organizations with Information Technology Departments have challenges with hiring cybersecurity professionals in this hypercompetitive environment due to a talent shortage

(Burrell & Nobles, 2018). Considering the complexity of acquiring engineering and technical talent for organizations, highlights a deficiency in strategic initiatives aiming to hire more women and minority technical professionals and creating a climate that makes them feel welcomed (Burrell & Nobles, 2018). The steps in the process include:

1. Hiring trained and experienced employees in diversity and inclusion roles.
2. An assessment of the climate.
3. Leadership support for change on all levels.
4. The development of formal plans, programs, and mission statement that support diversity and inclusion.
5. Education and awareness.
6. Commitment and focus on organizational change (Burrell, 2015).

## THE WAY FORWARD

The way forward is about leadership and all employees in technical workplaces becoming more educated of the aspects of diverse religions. This education is critical as the country and its workforce continues to be more diverse and international. The focus of all managers on all levels should be to provide a safe work environment where people can learn to value and respect the different backgrounds, races, and religions of others. Having the right diversity focus requires management to champion new aspects around employee engagement and diversity in ways that include:

1. Setting ground rules for what being respectful during the dialog is and should be.
2. Seeking first to learn about the faith of others from those in that faith before promoting perspectives and ideas that might not be based on fact.
3. Always assuming good intentions of those that engage in dialog. Helping everyone focus on this sets a tone to the dialog that keeps discussions constructive instead of being destructive.
4. Finding constructive ways to share aspects of their own faith without abrasively disparaging the aspects of faiths that are different than yours.
5. Speaking to others with sympathy and empathy in ways that you are tactful and thoughtful about the potential differences between your actual words and the intended means of your words.
6. Making interactions respectful discussions instead of continuous debates.
7. Trying not to paint all members of religion with a broad brush by making sweeping generalizations.

8.    Allowing opportunities to address ouches and oops in a caring manner. Even in skillful facilitations dialogs between those that are different can still have the propensity of someone being hurt or offended. When it happens, a skillful facilitation teaches those offended to say "ouch" and gives the other party and opportunity to understand their "oops" and rectify it.

Interesting future research around this topic could center around creating training courses and measuring the impact. Religious education training that provide education in ways that encourage constructive dialog in ways that diminish misunderstandings, conflict, and incivility in the technical workplace around those of diverse religions.

**Burrell Valued Diversity Equity and Civil Workplace Assessment Survey (2016)**
Below is a development of an assessment tool that can aid with the first step in the process.

*Using the 5-point scale below, rate each question based on your organization's level of engagement on a:*
_5 = Frequent level  _4 = Reasonable level  _3 = Fair level  _2 = Infrequent level  _1 = Never
1.    To what extent do you feel that a clear and openly publicized mission statement regarding equity and inclusion regarding culture, gender, race, religion, national origin, age, socioeconomic status, and disability?
_5     _4     _3     _2     _1
2.    To what extent do you feel that you are supported by your organization's culture and supervisors in terms of your ability to be open and honest about regarding your culture, gender, race, religion, national origin, age, socioeconomic status, and disability (if relevant)?
_5     _4     _3     _2     _1
3.    To what extent do you feel that your management and organizational leadership has a zero-tolerance approach to concerns and issues related to offenses towards others around bullying, harassment, discrimination, and prejudice regarding your culture, gender, race, religion, national origin, age, socioeconomic status, and disability (if relevant)??
_5     _4     _3     _2     _1
4.    To what extent do you feel that the supervisors and organization has policies, sets consistent expectations, rules, and consequences against behaviors that are non-biased regarding culture, gender, race, religion, national origin, age, socioeconomic status, and disability?
_5     _4     _3     _2     _1

5.      To what extent do you feel that tasks, visible project leadership roles, and significant training and professional development opportunities are distributed equitably by supervisors without regard to gender, race, national origin, or disability?

_5      _4      _3      _2      _1

6.      To what extent do you feel that your supervisors and organizational leadership show authentic concern against the use nonbiased verbal and nonverbal language by employees in organization regarding culture, gender, race, religion, national origin, age, socioeconomic status, and disability?

_5      _4      _3      _2      _1

7.      To what extent does your supervisors and organizational leadership encourage an organizational environment where commonalities are appreciated, and differences are understood and valued regarding culture, gender, race, religion, national origin, age, socioeconomic status, and disability?

_5      _4      _3      _2      _1

8.      To what extent do you feel that the behaviors and actions of your coworkers towards you match with the written values and mission of the organization around diversity, equity, inclusion?

_5      _4      _3      _2      _1

9.      To what extent do you feel that the organizational policies are relevant and fair as it relates to someone of your culture, gender, race, religion, national origin, age, socioeconomic status, and disability (if relevant)?

_5      _4      _3      _2      _1

10.     To what degree do you feel that organizational leaders are engaged in authentic actions, policies, and initiatives to ensure highly qualified members different cultures, genders, races, religions, ethnic backgrounds, or disabilities distributed equitably or constructively represented across the various job classifications from management to technical staff positions?

_5      _4      _3      _2      _1


**Scoring Scale Burrell Valued Diversity Equity and Civil Workplace Assessment Survey**

**41–50 points**  It seems extremely likely that diverse personnel, those of different cultures, genders, races, religions, ethnic backgrounds, or disabilities, in the organization feel much respected, and highly valued in the organizational culture by both their management and their coworkers.

**31–40 points**  It seems very likely that diverse personnel, those of different cultures, genders, races, religions, ethnic backgrounds, or disabilities, feel respected and valued

to a certain degree in the organizational culture by both their management and their coworkers.

**21–30 points** It seems somewhat likely that diverse personnel, those of different cultures, genders, races, religions, ethnic backgrounds, or disabilities, feel marginally respected and valued in the organizational culture by both their management and their coworkers.

**11–20 points** It seems minimally likely that the prevailing feeling on the part of diverse personnel, those of different cultures, genders, races, religions, ethnic backgrounds, or disabilities, is that their expertise and work contributions are not respected and valued in the organizational culture by both their management and their coworkers.

**0–10 points** It extremely likely that diverse employees are have adverse feelings about the workplace civility, workplace culture, the management, and co-workers in terms of respectful behaviors, values, policies, and procedures regarding different cultures, genders, races, religions, ethnic backgrounds, or disabilities.

Source: Developed by Darrell Norman in 2016 Burrell as result of research done in conjunction a graduate capstone project at Claremont Lincoln University.

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