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How to promote an inclusive workplace during Ramadan

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*In the holy month of Ramadan, fasting Muslims worldwide refrain from food and drink, including water, in daylight hours. To promote a working culture inclusive of all religions, **Nikita and Jasmine Virhia** offer practical advice on how leaders and employees can support their Muslim colleagues during this period.*

Ramadan is considered the holiest month in Islamic culture. It is currently ongoing, having begun on 22 March 2023, and is set to end on 21 April, when Muslims worldwide will celebrate Eid al-Fitr. Fasting and prayer are the cornerstones of this month for Muslims, but it also carries an inclusive spirit that emphasises the values of community, charity, and compassion.

During this time, fasting Muslims refrain from food and drink (including water) during daylight hours. This means fasting starts before dawn and ends at sunset, often lasting between 14 and 16 hours depending on location. The long hours of fasting combined with warm climates can be a difficult challenge for many Muslims, especially those who are working. This can lead to fatigue and lack of energy during the day, with the first ten days typically being the most challenging.

Inclusive leaders and colleagues can contribute to making Ramadan easier for their Muslim colleagues. According to a [2021 survey](#) of working British Muslims, the most desired support from employers included flexible work shifts (favoured by 69% of the participants), followed by team members understanding the significance of Ramadan to them (60%), and taking annual leave during the last days of Ramadan (58%).

By supporting your Muslim colleagues during Ramadan, you can contribute to creating an inclusive workplace, which aligns with the true essence of the holy month. We suggest four actions that can help you be an inclusive leader as well as four actions that can help you be an inclusive colleague during Ramadan.

Things you can do as an inclusive leader:

Allow your colleagues to take short breaks for prayer throughout the day and avoid scheduling meetings at these times. Two of the five daily prayers are likely to fall within traditional working hours. If your office or onsite facilities do not have a dedicated prayer room, make meeting rooms available that employees can book. The space offered for praying should be neat and clean.

Consider that working schedules may differ throughout the month as some colleagues may prefer to start their day earlier or work later, so be flexible. Employees shouldn't be expected to work longer hours or at the weekends to make up for the time spent on prayers throughout the day.

Embrace hybrid working whenever possible. Make provisions to take breaks in between meetings and avoid hosting very long meetings, especially at the end of the day.

Accommodate leave requests as employees may want to take leave that is typically dedicated to Christmas or Easter holidays during Ramadan instead. Many organisations including Deloitte and Spotify have **adopted this approach**, thus promoting inclusivity across faiths.

Things you can do as an inclusive co-worker:

Muslim colleagues appreciate it when you recognise Ramadan and greet them, much like wishing everyone 'Merry Christmas'. You can say 'Ramadan Kareem' which means "generous Ramadan", or "Ramadan Mubarak" which means wishing someone a blessed Ramadan, or you can simply say "Happy Ramadan".

Many Muslims will not be offended if you eat or drink in front of them during their fasting hours, however it is polite to ask. Also, don't assume that all Muslims will be fasting throughout the month as women do not during menstruation or pregnancy, nor are the elderly or those with chronic illnesses obliged to.

While **organising social events**, factor in the interests of all the team members. This may involve changing the timings of social gatherings as iftar (fast-breaking evening meal) occurs once the sun has set. Also, be considerate that events centred around alcohol consumption might exclude members of your team.

Educate yourself on **what Ramadan is** and celebrate with your colleagues. Some people opt to fast for a day to better understand the experience and will host iftar celebrations with their Muslim colleagues.

Supporting your Muslim colleagues during Ramadan is an opportunity to create an inclusive workplace and demonstrate your commitment to diversity and inclusivity. By taking these simple actions, you can make a positive impact on your colleagues' experiences and foster an inclusive workplace culture that benefits everyone.



Notes:

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