THE COIN HAS TWO FACES: DIFFERENCES THAT MATTER

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The plurality of religious traditions and cultures has come to characterize every part of the world today…Pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity. Diversity can and has meant the creation of religious ghettos with little traffic between or among them. Today diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies…Pluralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference…Pluralism is not relativism, but the encounter of commitments…is based on dialogue…

Diana L. Eck (2006, paras. 1-4)
Professor of Comparative Religions and Indian studies, Harvard University

As companies do more and more business around the world. Diversity isn’t simply a matter of doing what is fair or good public relations. It’s a business imperative.

Carol Heimowitz (2005, p. R1)
The Wall Street Journal

CASE DESCRIPTION

A diverse workforce poses unique challenges to organizations. While employees with different backgrounds bring a gamut of cultural values to the workplace, conflicts, misunderstandings, and stress may increase. Embracing employees’ differences can be a major challenge to organizations.

The core pedagogical objective of this decision case research is to help provide an applied, hands-on format for students to increase their understanding and appreciation of the ethnic diversity and beliefs of others. It also advocates organizational pluralism, where employees feel they are fully integrated rather than isolated and ignored.
CASE SYNOPSIS

In 1992 seven year old Hussain Abdullah Osman, his parents and four siblings left their war-torn homeland Somalia, to live in a refugee camp in Kenya. In early 2007, Hussain resettled with his family in Grand Island, Nebraska, to work for a meat packing company, JBS SA. JBS hired Hussain soon after the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) raided its plant and several other meat packing plants in different states. ICE agents arrested hundreds of undocumented Latino immigrants who were working there illegally.

The aforementioned raid resulted in the deportation of many workers and caused other undocumented workers, not present during the raid, to leave town. Management of the JBS Grand Island plant moved quickly and recruited Somali refugees who resided legally in the U.S. from locations such as Minneapolis, MN and Columbus, OH to work at its meat packing plant.

In September 2008, Muslim workers (mostly Somalis) at the JBS SA plant in Nebraska walked out to demand time for prayer and dinner during their holy month of Ramadan. The union representatives and company’s management agreed to accommodate a prayer time at sunset by moving a scheduled break up by 15 minutes. However, the Latino immigrant workers led counter-protests and walked out the next day complaining that the Muslims were being favored. After two days of tension and work disruption, the company reversed its course regarding the break time and fired Somali workers and others who walked out in protest. The United Food and Commercial Workers UFCW, Local 22, filed a grievance and encouraged fired workers to return and talk to union representatives.

Many of the new Somali workers were observant Muslims who wanted to practice the traditional religious prayer schedule. Despite a different outward appearance, the objections by the non-Muslim workers and managers at the plant were not religious based, but were largely due to economic reasons.

In fact, the recruitment and hiring of Somali refugees at JBS solved the problem of hiring undocumented immigrants and having to risk the possibility of additional ICE raids. The Somalis were good workers, but the observation of Ramadan, and its requisite prayer breaks caused consternation between the Somalis and the Latino workers at the plant; that created an obvious division in the plant. The real trouble between the Latino workers and the Somali workers was not based on differing religious beliefs as much as it was based on increased workloads created by the Somalis leaving the line to pray.

It was the last Monday of September, 2008 and both management and the United Food and Commercial Workers Representatives at JBS, Grand Island were concerned about the tensions at the plant and wanted to find a good solution that would not only accommodate the Somali workers but also help build a sustainable diversity plan, while effectively managing its operations.

AN INTRODUCTION

It was 1992 and one of those scorching summer days where a hot day just got hotter when Hussain Abdullah Osman, age seven, left his war-torn homeland, Somalia, with his parents and four siblings to live in a refugee camp in Kenya. Fourteen years later, he resettled with his family in Grand Island, Nebraska, a central Nebraska town of 43,000 people to work for a meat packing company, JBS SA. (Also known as Swift & Company, its original name).
Thousands of miles away, in 2004, Jose Rodriguez, twenty-two years old, escaped his home town of Nuevo Laredo, in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, and crossed the Mexico-US border via the Rio Grande, to move to Laredo, Texas. Jose left Mexico to escape drug wars carried out by the Mexican Transnational Criminal Organizations vying for control of the lucrative drug trafficking routes that resulted in the killing of thousands of people (OSAC, 2013). He also came to the US to escape poverty and to find a job opportunity that might help provide for his elderly parents and younger siblings. Jose entered the US illegally in October 2004 and finally resettled in Grand Island, Nebraska where one of his distant cousins lived and worked for JBS SA’s meat packing plant. A couple of days later, Jose was hired by JBS to work on the slaughter line.

**Exhibit 1**
An Image of Grand Island’s Cathedral of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

![Grand Island's Cathedral of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grand_Island_%28Nebraska%29_cathedral_from_N.JPG)

As a result of his employment at JBS, Jose established himself as part of the Latino community in Grand Island, enjoyed a better lifestyle, and was able to transfer some money to aid his family in Mexico. Due to some unfortunate luck, he was arrested and deported after a United States Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), raid on the plant in December 2006. The ICE raid caused an immediate need for documented workers at JBS providing the aforementioned opportunity for Hussain to work there on the slaughter line.

**JBS SA: COMPANY PROFILE**

The company was founded in 1855 by 16-year-old Gustavus Franklin Swift in West Sandwich (now Sagamore), Massachusetts. He began his career at the age of 14, when he went to work for an older brother who owned a butcher shop (Robinson Library, 2014; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013). The young Swift was able to start his own meat business when his father gave him $20. He used $19 to purchase a heifer, which he then butchered and sold out of his father's wagon. At a later time, he was able to buy another heifer and repeated the process (Robinson Library, 2014).
By working long hours and exhibiting great skills in judging the value of the cattle, the younger Swift had made enough money to open his own butcher shop in Eastham, Massachusetts in 1859. He then hired another brother to run it and opened a second store in Barnstable, Massachusetts (Robinson Library, 2014).

The company was incorporated as Swift & Company in Chicago in 1875 after it expanded to Brighton, Massachusetts; Albany and Buffalo, New York. Swift believed that there were more cattle to choose from in Chicago (Robinson Library, 2014; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013). Swift also believed that meatpacking would be more profitable than meat selling, especially if he could ship fresh meat from Chicago to the east coast population center rather than ship live cattle that would be slaughtered upon arrival. He acted accordingly and hired an engineer to design a refrigerated railroad cart (Robinson Library, 2014; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013).

When the late Gustavus Swift died in Chicago in 1903, the company he founded remained a family owned business until it was bought by ConAgra Foods in 1988 (Robinson Library, 2014). However, in 2002, Swift & Company was purchased by Hicks, Muse, Tate & Furst, a private equity group when ConAgra divested its fresh beef and pork processing business (Refrigerated Transporter, 2014). Finally, Swift & Company was acquired again in 2007 by the Brazilian meat giant, JBS S.A., for $225 million and assumed its heavy debt load, estimated at more than $1 billion (Hoovers.com, 2014).

THE MEAT, BEEF, AND THE POULTRY PROCESSING INDUSTRY IN THE US:
INDUSTRY PROFILE

Companies in this industry slaughtered animals, processed the carcasses and packaged the meat into products and by-products. Additionally, companies also purified and refined animal fat, bones and meat scraps. Products were sold to meat and grocery wholesalers, retail traders, other food manufacturers, renderers, and retail traders (IBIS, 2014; First Research, 2014). The industry revolutionary breeding processes helped develop meat animals with lower fat content, faster weight gain, and much greater quality. Additionally, the various meat qualities allowed meat packers to offer branded products, such as Angus beef, organic (grass-fed) meat, and low fat Bison meat with a minimum amount of hormones, for which some consumers were willing to pay a premium (First Research, 2014).

Meat processing required workers to make repetitive motions with sharp tools, making it one of the most injury-prone jobs in the US (First Research, 2014). Very importantly, labor turnover in this industry was high as the workers in slaughterhouses and meat processing plants received relatively low wages and often worked in difficult conditions (First Research, 2014).

According to IBIS reports (2014), the Meat, Beef and Poultry Processing industry has had a medium concentration of ownership. Although the industry had a few meat processing and meat related companies, the key players in this industry, namely: Cargill, Inc.; JBS SA, Inc.; Smithfield, Inc.; and Tysons Food, Inc.; the aforementioned four largest companies in the industry were estimated to account for just over one-third of the domestic market (IBIS, 2014). Please refer to exhibit 2.

While the US was and still is the world's largest producer of beef and poultry, it was the third-largest pork producer in the world (IBIS, 2014). Two of the US major players in this industry, JBS SA and Smithfield were foreign-owned companies. JBS SA was Brazilian-owned
and the later Smithfield was owned by Chinese Shuanghui International. Said companies were sold to foreign-owned companies in the past decade (IBIS, 2014).

**Exhibit 2**
The Meat, Beef, and Poultry Processing Market Share in the U.S.

![Exhibit 2](image)

**Source**: This exhibit was based on information published by IBIS World, 2014.

**Cargill, Inc.**

One of the US oldest companies, Cargill Inc. was founded in Iowa in 1865 when it entered the grains industry. Located in Minnesota, Cargill became a global marketer, processor, and distributor of agricultural and food products, in addition to financial and industrial products and services. The company had over 142,000 employees in 62 countries. On an annual basis, the company processed over 8 million cattle and over 10 million hogs (IBIS, 2014). Cargill operated via its food ingredients and applications segment located in Wichita, Kansas, known as Cargill Meat Solutions. In addition to that, the company owned and operated two pork-processing facilities in the states of Illinois and Iowa; produced, processed and marketed poultry; and marketed turkeys and turkey parts branded Honeysuckle White and Riverside brands from its turkey-processing facilities (IBIS, 2014). Furthermore, Cargill also made refrigerated boxed pork products and processes meat in Central America, Asia and Europe (IBIS, 2014). In fiscal 2014, Cargill's meat-processing revenue was estimated at $12.0 billion (IBIS, 2014).

**JBS SA**

A conglomerate Brazilian multinational, JBS SA was (and continues to be) the world's largest animal protein processor (IBIS, 2014). Its subsidiary, JBS USA Holdings was the American and Australian arm of JBS SA. Located in Greeley, CO, JBS USA produced and marketed about twenty four brands of beef, pork and chicken in the United States. While JBS USA had beef, pork, sheep, and lamb-processing operations; it also owned JBS Five Rivers, the nation's largest feedlot operator.
The company sought to expand its US market share aggressively over the past five years through acquisitions, which resulted in the purchase of Pilgrim's Pride, a US leading poultry processor after Pilgrim filed bankruptcy in late 2009 (IBIS, 2014). In fiscal 2014, the company's revenue from US operations was estimated at $24.6 billion (IBIS, 2014).

**Smithfield Food, Inc.**

Headquartered in Smithfield, Virginia; the company was founded in 1936. According to IBIS (2104), Smithfield was the largest pork processor and hog producer in the world. Smithfield grew through acquisitions beginning in 1981 (over 30 acquisitions). In addition to its US operations, Smithfield had (and continues to have) operations in Mexico, Europe, and in China. In September 2013, Shuanghui International, a Chinese meat processor, acquired Smithfield for about $7.1 billion. This acquisition was the largest takeover of an American U.S. company by a Chinese firm to date. In January 2014, Shuanghui has changed its name to WH Group (IBIS, 2014).

Smithfield operated through its pork segment. The company vertically integrated by sourcing much of its livestock (about 50.0%) from its hog production segment to ensure adequate supply. While beef operations were a major source of Smithfield's offerings, the company was the fifth-largest beef processor and the largest cattle feedlot operator in the US; Smithfield sold it to JBS SA in 2008 for $565 million (IBIS, 2014). According to IBIS (2014), the sale was motivated by the company's inability to grow in this segment. It used the proceeds to reduce debts and invest in higher return opportunities. In fiscal year 2014, Smithfield’s (WH, its new name) meat-processing revenue was estimated at $12.0 billion (IBIS, 2014).

**Tysons Foods, Inc.**

Headquartered in Springdale, AR, the company started in 1935 as a one-man poultry operation and has grown to about 115,000 employees and over 300 locations in 130 countries (IBIS, 2014). Tysons has become the world's largest processor of chicken, beef and pork (IBIS, 2014). The company has had seven international subsidiaries that served the markets in Asia, Europe, and South America. In 2014, Tyson's meat-processing revenue was estimated at $33.4 billion (IBIS, 2014).

**TENSION AT THE JBS SA NEBRASKA MEATPACKING PLANT**

Tensions at the JBS SA’s Grand Island, Nebraska, plant began after the December 2006 raid by ICE, one of the largest immigration stings in U.S. history. JBS plants in six states, “Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Texas, Colorado, and Utah were raided and dubbed by immigration officials, Operation Wagon Train” (Conley, 2013; Kammer, 2009). Please see exhibit 3.

According to Kammer (2009):

The raids resulted in 1,297 arrests, a number equal to about 10 percent of Swift’s workforce at the plants. But because the raids were confined to the first shift, the actual share of the workforce that was illegal was much higher. While all those arrested faced illegal immigration charges, several hundred were also charged with illegally assuming
the identity of U.S. citizens by using fraudulently acquired Social Security numbers (para. 4).

Exhibit 3
ICE Immigration Enforcement Agents Transporting Suspects After a Raid

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Immigration_and_Customs_Enforcement

As steam billowed on this cold December day from the roof of Grand Island’s largest employer, 250 suspected illegal immigrant workers were arrested and detained in this town alone (Conley, 2013). This raid led to chaos and confusion that sparked anger, caused substantial production problems, and attracted a group of protesters as those suspected illegal workers were herded onto buses and taken away (Conley, 2013). According to Carlos Barcenas, an immigrant from Mexico and local pastor of Vida Nueva: "Some ladies were heard yelling, 'please take care of my kids' (Conley, 2013, para. 7). Yolanda Chavez Nuncio, Chair of Nebraska Latino American Commission recalled (in Conley, 2013):

Part of the issue was that a lot of times people didn't know that their parents or family members had been arrested and it took time for the word to get out (para. 9).

As a consequence to this raid, Grand Island community members, the school system, churches, and other organizations came together to take care of the children whose parents were arrested and find safe homes and food for them (Conley, 2013). Grand Island police wanted to help and the community knew that this action was taken by the “Feds” and that local law enforcement was not involved. Margaret Hornady, Mayor of Grand Island at the time of the raids, confirmed that the police had little to no advance warning of the raids (2014). It was a difficult time for affected families. In some situations, both parents worked at the plant and if both were arrested by ICE, the children had nowhere to go when they were dismissed from
school. The school system worked with these children and helped locate places for them to stay while their parents were going through the immigration process (Barcenas, 2014, Hornady, 2014). According to Barcenas (2014), the arrests brought different segments of the community together. However, the continued downside of the raids was that “everybody runs when they hear about immigration.”

Following the raid, many workers were deported and other undocumented workers who were not there during the raid left town. The stricter enforcement of immigration laws coupled with federal immigration crackdown hit meat and poultry-packing plants particularly hard and had a significant impact on the industry. As a result, the management of JBS at the Nebraska plant and at other plants was forced to find American workers or immigrants who resided legally in the US.

As they struggled to fill the grueling low-wage jobs that attract few workers who were United States citizens, they advertised in immigrant-based newspapers and circulated fliers in immigrant neighborhoods (Kammer, 2009; Semple, 2008). JBS moved quickly to replace these workers and immediately recruited Somali refugees from locations such as Minneapolis, MN and Columbus, OH to work at the meat packing plant (Lamken, 2014). There was no specific corporate initiative to determine the religious or cultural practices of the recruited refugees, and any such efforts were left to managers of the individual locations. Somali refugees, like Hussain Abdullah Osman, started to work at the Grand Island plant in January 2007; at that time, approximately 200 of the 2800 employees were Somalis (Lamken, 2014).

Like any other city that was hit with an immigration wave and was seeking legally documented workers, Grand Island witnessed an influx of Somali immigrant workers and their families who resided legally in the US as political refugees (Semple, 2008). Many Mexican-American workers at the JBS meatpacking plant watched with some discomfort as hundreds of Somali immigrants moved to town to fill jobs once held by Latino workers who were taken away in immigration raids (Semple, 2008).

Grand Island’s Chief of Police Steve Lamken commented: “A new population was plopped into our community with no notice. The Somalis were more of a contrast from past immigrant populations, such as Sudanese immigrants. The Somali women wore ‘head scarves,’ the Somalis were from a very different culture, were not Christian as compared to the Sudanese, and were Muslims. The community struggled to build some level of contact with the Somalis, but it was difficult” (Lamken, 2014). Chief Lamken learned that the Somali community claimed to be tribal, yet Grand Island did not have an Imam or a strong elder among the Somalis. There was no leader. They came to Grand Island to work, but were not part of a tribal community, even though they claimed to be tribal, which made it difficult to engage in a community discourse (Lamken, 2014).

While the employees at the plant worked hard, they had no formal education and were not literate in English. The city of Grand Island was (and still is) a blue collar/meat packing community; it dealt with numerous issues of multi-culturalism. None of the immigrants ever left Grand Island saying they were treated poorly (Brown, 2014; Lamken, 2014). However, “the attitudes of some people in the community towards the immigrants included closed-mindedness and many wished the meat packing plant and its employees would just go away” (Brown, 2014). This opinion was supported by Stephani Riak Akuei, an anthropologist who resided in Grand Island and is married to a Sudanese immigrant. According to Ms. Akuei (2014):
This is a small white Anglo-German town and most people are not accepting of different cultures. . . . People here are mid-westerners, church going people, not very out-going, create prejudices, and know nothing about refugee adaptation. People live in their own enclaves.

RIGHT OR FAVORITISM

In September 2008, when Hussain had worked at JBS SA, Grand Island, for over a year and half, a number of Muslim workers (mostly Somalis) walked out to demand time for prayer and dinner during their holy month of Ramadan. The union representatives and the company’s management met with Somali workers and agreed to accommodate a prayer time at sunset by moving a scheduled break up 15 minutes (Eyck, 2008). The management at the JBS SA’s plant and the local United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) agreed to temporarily change the timing of the second-shift lunch break to accommodate workers wanting time to pray at sunset during the Muslim observance of Ramadan (about 30 days long). Workers usually took the 30-minute break in shifts. However the agreed upon change forced the entire line to break at once during the Ramadan, which according to union officials did not violate the union contract (Starherald.com, 2008).

An accommodation for one group’s needs can both disrupt production and stoke resentment. As the company agreed to accommodate the prayer requests for the Muslim workers, other non-Muslim workers, largely Latino immigrants, led counter-protests and walked out the next day complaining that the Muslims were being favored (Eyck, 2008). Workers told local press that the company’s action was unfair and that the change would shorten everyone’s hours and pay, a charge denied by the union. Others said they simply didn’t want to see the accommodations made (Eyck, 2008). After two days of tension and work disruption at Grand Island’s plant, the company reversed its course regarding the break time and went further by firing Somali workers and others who walked out in protest. The UFCW Local 22, filed a grievance and encouraged fired workers to come back and talk to union representatives (Eyck, 2008).

The situation was so volatile that, Grand Island’s mayor, Margaret Hornady, longtime resident of Nebraska, reflected by saying “every wave of immigrants has had to struggle to get assimilated” (in Semple, 2008, para. 10). Different from the Mexican workers who were deported, many of the new Somali workers were observant Muslims who wanted to practice the traditional religious prayer schedule. This was complicated even further, since few spoke English (Semple, 2008). Please see exhibit 4 for praying time.

**Exhibit 4:**
Prayer “Salat” in the Muslim Faith

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayer “Salat”*</th>
<th>Prayer Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Salat al-fajr</td>
<td>Dawn, before sunrise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Salat al-zuhr</td>
<td>Midday, after the sun passes its highest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Salat al-’asr</td>
<td>The late part of the afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Salat al-maghrib</td>
<td>Just after sunset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Salat al-’isha</td>
<td>Between sunset and midnight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Salat is the obligatory Muslim prayers, performed five times each day by Muslims. It is the second Pillar of Islam. All Muslims try to do this. Muslim children as young as seven are encouraged to pray (BBC Religions, 2009). Since each Prayer takes about 7 minutes to perform, that adds up to over 30 minutes of private time (Wikia, n.d.; Radi, 2014).

Management at JBS failed to contemplate important cultural as well as religious differences between the Latino non-Muslim employees and the Muslim Somali employees. JBS did not consider the ramifications in the workplace for the Latino immigrants who remained employed at the plant after the 2006 immigration raids, and experienced an increase in their workload when the newly hired Somali refugees left the line for regular prayers. Following the ICE raids, JBS “didn’t want to be raided again” (Hornady, 2014).

The Somalis wanted special consideration for prayer breaks during Ramadan; however, the objections to prayer breaks by the non-Muslim workers and managers at the plant weren’t religiously based, but were primarily due to economic reasons (Hornady, 2014). This point was echoed by Nicky Coolberth, Assistant Communications Director for UFCW, who said, “the real issue when you work on a line is having a sufficient crewing. The underlying problem was the Somali workers were leaving the line” (Coolberth, 2014). When the Somali workers walked off the line they were violating the guidelines of the break times delineated in their contract. But at the same time, they were practicing their religious liberties. “The root of the problem is that people go to work every day and it gets harder and harder when someone leaves the line. Understanding and managing different cultures and holidays in the work place can be a very difficult organization, employee and management issue” (Coolberth, 2014).

The problem wasn’t really a racial or cultural problem at its root. The Latinos thought it was fine that the Somalis should be able to pray, and had a general tolerance for people celebrating their religions. They didn’t want to get stuck with extra work and they also felt like, well, okay can I walk off work during the Feast of our Lady of Guadalupe? The real issue was that there was an entirely new group of people who arrived mid-contract, but the contract was negotiated before they got there (Coolberth, 2014).

The recruitment and hiring of Somalian refugees at JBS eliminated the problem of experiencing additional ICE raids by hiring documented workers. The Somalis were good workers, but the observation of Ramadan and its requisite prayer breaks caused consternation between the Somali and Latino workers at the plant; that created an obvious division in the plant (Coolberth, 2014).

The workforce of 2800-3000 employees was evenly split between the two shifts. The plant operations were divided between the slaughter and fabrication departments, with three times as many employees in the fabrication department, as compared to the slaughter department. Employees were routinely disciplined for “walking off,” or leaving their lines or work stations without notice or permission, regardless of the reason or excuse given. Leaving the line without permission caused problems including: a product progressing down the production chain without being trimmed or deboned, a product stacking up, or even a product falling on the floor. JBS did not discipline or discharge any of its Muslim employees for praying, but some were disciplined for walking off their lines without permission (United States District Court, 2013). Such requests were usually granted and angered the non-Muslim employees.
The existing union contract had been negotiated before Somali Muslims became a significant part of the factory workforce, when religious needs had not been an issue, and break times were assigned according to a rigid schedule to ensure continuous production and prevent workers from working too long without a break. The sharp knives the meat packers wield for their job posed a substantial risk of accidental injury (Semple, 2008; Eyck, 2008). According to Semple (2008):

This newest wave of immigrant workers has had the effect of unifying the other ethnic populations against the Somalis and has also diverted some of the longstanding hostility toward Latino immigrants among some native-born residents (para. 9).

“A lot of the initial conflict comes from lack of understanding of the religious practices… they may not understand why people think it’s important to fight for,” said Renaye Manley, organizing director for Interfaith Worker Justice, an organization that promotes workers’ rights in the faith community (Eyck, 2008, para. 14). However, Jill Cashen of the UFCW stated that “tensions at Swift had been building and weren’t just about workers’ misunderstanding of Ramadan traditions... workers leaving the moving line to pray caused workload problems and safety concerns for others” (Eyck, 2008, para. 14).

**JBS CORPORATE POLICIES**

JBS’s corporate office established broad policies pertaining to discrimination, harassment, retaliation, absenteeism, and retention, yet relegated the day to day responsibilities to address these matters to each plant’s individual Human Resources Office. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission compliance training known as “Best Work Environment” was given to all employees. Workers at the plant were represented by the UFCW Local 22, responsible for making requests to management to accommodate employees’ religious practices (U.S. District Court Transcript, 2013).

In 2007-2008, the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) in place stated that JBS and the Union would provide reasonable accommodations to employees based on their religious tenets. The CBA stated that JBS would determine what accommodations to provide based on its interpretation of the United States Civil Rights Act, 42 U.S.C. Section 2000. In 2007-2008 JBS’s unwritten policy in relation to breaks was that unscheduled breaks were for restroom purposes only. There was no policy allowing breaks for prayer and break requests were given at the discretion of the supervisor (U.S. District Court Transcript, 2013).

In September 2008, JBS and Union representatives met with Muslim employees, who requested a break at sunset in order to pray. The employees were told that the only way this request could be accommodated was if the break occurred at the designated meal break between 7:30 and 8:30 p.m. per the CBA. This was unacceptable to the Muslim employees since sunset times change during the year. Management’s position was that 200 employees could not be relieved from work within the same 10 minute window as this would create safety and quality control concerns (U.S. District Court Transcript, 2013).
THE LATINOS OF GRAND ISLAND

The Latino community in Grand Island was composed primarily of Mexican, Central, and South American immigrants who maintained the cultures and traditions of their homeland. The Latino women from Mexico continued to cook Mexican-style meals and practiced certain family rituals that included singing traditional ballads with children in the evening. Mexican women were also credited with instilling Catholic beliefs and practices in their children and proliferating the church’s dogma, the foundations of Catholicism beliefs. Although modern secular beliefs found their way into the lives of the younger generations, philosophically, Catholicism remained strong in Grand Island (Gamio, 1971). According to Barcenas (2014):

Although a large number of Mexican immigrants identified themselves as Catholics, the Latino immigrants in Grand Island do not practice religion as regular church goers. ... People are too busy, most people only had Sundays off from work and they spent the day with their family – shopping, boating, visiting, etc. ... The first and second generation immigrants were falling apart.

Latino and Mexican-American religious traditions included a uniform cultural identity and sense of pride. These traditions supported ongoing struggles for justice coupled with resistance to assimilate into American culture (Matovia & Riebe-Estrella, 2002). There was always a lack of conformity to the American way of life among Latino immigrants. The Mexican-American Pastor stated: “Many people who come to this country, want to be here, but they don’t want to be part of America. They come here and we (Americans) don’t teach them how to assimilate. Despite the Latino population’s self-identification as Christians or Catholics, religion is generally not a part of the routine of day to day life, and does not play a role in the work place” (2014).

Like many other Latino workers, Jose Rodriguez was part of the large employee base of approximately 2800-3000 employees at the JBS Grand Island plant; his routine of going to work every day and providing a living for his family was disrupted and underwent dramatic change on December 12, 2006.

THE SOMALIS OF GRAND ISLAND

Over the past century, many towns and small cities across the United States have experienced and become accustomed to multicultural and multiethnic pluralism. While Hispanic communities acclimate to the Judeo-Christian identity, such was not the case with the new immigrant population from Somalia. Unlike the undocumented or documented Hispanic workers, Somali refugees brought new questions and challenges to ethnic diversification (Shandy, & Fennelly, 2006). Communities such as Grand Island were faced with a cultural shift and a contrasting identity because refugees who emigrated from Somalia were of Muslim faith, which caused social and cultural integration challenges (Trabalzi & Sandoval, 2010).

Islam was and still is the primary religion in Somalia. The majority of Somalis were (and still are) Sunni Muslims. Almost all social norms, attitudes, customs, and gender roles among Somalis derive from Islamic tradition (Lewis, 2008). They followed the five pillars of Islamic faith: (1) Faith or belief in the Oneness of God and the finality of the prophet Muhammad; (2) prayer five times a day; (3) giving 2.5% of one's income to charity; (4) making a pilgrimage to
Holly Mecca (in Saudi Arabia), at least once in one’s lifetime; and (5) fasting from dawn until dusk every day during the month of Ramadan (Somalis, 2012). During the ninth month of the lunar calendar, Muslims, including Somalis, observe Ramadan to mark the initial revelations to the prophet Muhammad (Lewis, 2008). During the 30 days of Ramadan, people pray and fast between sunrise and sunset. Pregnant women, the ill, and children are exempted from the fast (Lewis, 2008).

The culture of Somalia was a mix of traditions that was indigenously developed over a period of time as a result of the wave of old centuries migration into Somalia that started in the 5th century A.D. from Africa and followed by Arabs and Persian in the 11th century A.D. (Somalia, 2012). The Somalis have acquired and cultivated the art of memorizing and speaking for long hours. They were also (and still are) extremely keen listeners and learners, had (and still have) a rich musical heritage centered on traditional Somali folklore. “Due to the Somali people’s love for and facility with poetry, Somalia has been referred to by scholars as a “Nation of Poets” and a “Nation of Bards” (Somalia, 2012:7). It was a fact that neither the tenet requiring prayer five times a day nor the importance of Ramadan to Muslims was considered by Swift (JBS) during the hiring process of the Somali employees at the plant.

DECISION TIME: WHAT TO DO?

It was the last Monday of September 2008, both management and UFCW Local 22 representatives at JBS, Grand Island, were concerned about the tension at the plant and wanted to find a good solution that would not only accommodate the Somali workers but would also build sustainable diversity awareness for all employees and managers, while effectively managing its operations.

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Hornady, M. (September 16, 2014). An interview with Margaret Hornady, the former Mayor of Grand Island, Nebraska.


Radi, H. (September 12, 2014). Prayer in Islam: An interview with Hasan Radi, Imam (Muslim Scholar), Islamic Center of Claremont, CA.


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AUTHORS SINCERE APPRECIATION

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END NOTES

1 This case was prepared by Issam A. Ghazzawi and Marie Palladini as a basis for class discussion, rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a management situation. The case was based on both primary and secondary data. For information, contact: ighazzawi@laverne.edu.

The authors extend their deepest appreciation to members of the Grand Island, NE., community who provided insight into this case.

1 ConAgra Foods purchased 50% of Swift in 1988 and the remaining portion in 1990.

1 JBS S.A. was the largest beef processor in South America and one of the largest worldwide beef exporters. The acquisition made the newly consolidated JBS Swift Group the largest beef processor in the world.

1 Tens of thousands of Somali refugees fleeing civil war have settled in the United States since the 1990s, with the largest concentration in Minnesota. Hundreds of thousands of Somalis died as a result of this war.

1 Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. It is a time of fasting for the Islamic people. Each day during this month, Muslims all over the world abstain from eating, drinking, smoking, as well as participating in anything that is ill-natured or excessive; from dawn until the sun sets. Fasting is one of the Five Pillars of the Islam religion, and one of the main types of Islamic worship. Fasting is intended to educate the Muslim in spirituality, humility and patience. It is a time to cleanse the soul, focus attention on God, and put into practice selflessness. Ramadan is a time for Muslims to fast for the sake of God and to put forward more prayer than is customary. For more information, refer to: http://whatisramadan.com/ and/or http://beliefnet.com

1 Muslims do not pray for the benefit of God “Allah”. They pray because God has command them to pray, and accordingly, they believe they obtain great benefit by praying (BBC
Religions, 2009). While they can pray at any place, it is especially good to pray with others in a mosque. Praying together in a congregation helps Muslims to realize that all humanity is one, and they are all equal in the presence of almighty God (BBC Religions, 2009).

This prayer timetable gives Muslims the pattern/rhythm of their day. Prayer for a Muslim involves uniting mind, soul, and body in worship; so a Muslim carrying out these prayers will perform a whole series of set movements that go with the words of the prayer. The prayer ritual, which is over 1400 years old, is repeated five times a day by hundreds of millions of people all round the world. Carrying it out is not only highly spiritual, but connects each Muslim to all others around the world, and to all those who have uttered the same words and made the same movements at different times in Islamic history. In their prayer, there is no need for a priest to act as an intermediary; instead, there exist a prayer leader in the mosque—the imam. He is not a priest, simply a person who knows a great deal about the faith. For more information, please refer to (BBC Religions, 2009).

In certain circumstances, if someone was not able to perform one's prayer within the prescribed time period; the prayer must be performed as soon as one is able to do so. Additionally, when travelling over long distances or in other circumstances, one may shorten some prayers, a practice known as “qasr”. Furthermore, several prayer times may be joined, which is referred to as Jam' bayn as-Salaatayn. Qasr involves shortening the obligatory components of the Zuhr, Asr, and Isha prayers to two rakats. Jam' bayn as-Salaatayn combines the Zuhr and Asr prayers into one prayer and prayed 2 Rakats each in one session, offered between noon and sunset, and the Maghrib and Isha prayed 3 Rakats then 2 in one session between sunset and Midnight. Neither Qasr nor Jam' bayn as-Salaatayn can be applied to the Fajr prayer (Radi, 2014; BBC Religions, 2009).
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