

COMMUNITY BUSINESS



FOSTERING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY & INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE IN INDIA



Knowledge Partner:



Sponsor:



ABOUT COMMUNITY BUSINESS

Community Business is a not-for-profit organisation (Hong Kong Charity Number 91/6560) whose mission is to lead, inspire and support businesses to have a positive impact on people and communities. A recognised leader in advancing responsible and inclusive business practices in Asia, Community Business facilitates networks, conducts research and events, leads programmes and campaigns and provides training and consultancy. Our focus on responsible business is aligned to four mission-led themes:

- Building responsible leadership
- Tackling workplace inequality
- Ensuring employee wellbeing
- Promoting social inclusion

Founded in 2003 and headquartered in Hong Kong with a presence in India and working with dedicated partners and consultants across Asia, Europe and the Americas, Community Business works with companies of all sizes and from diverse industries across Asia, harnessing the power of business to drive social change. For more information, please visit www.communitybusiness.org.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the contribution of a wide range of stakeholders. In particular, Community Business is grateful to all the experts who contributed to this research, sharing their perspectives and insights directly with us, including (in alphabetical order by first name): Abhijit Naskar, Christie Caldwell, Christina Dhanaraj, Devika Jaykumari, Freeda Fernandes, Mark Fowler, Mary-Frances Winters, Dr Pankaj Jain, Prasanth Nair, Ratnaprabha Sable, Tracy Ann Curtis and Professor Vasanthi Srinivasan. In addition, we would like to thank those companies who engaged with us on this topic, putting forward HR, D&I leaders and/or employees from their organisations to share their insights and approach, some of whom have been quoted anonymously. These companies include: Barclays, KPMG, MiQ Digital, Microsoft, Nielsen and Sodexo. Finally we thank all those who completed our Online Employee Survey.

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FOREWORD

COMMUNITY BUSINESS



“ Community Business is proud of its reputation as a pioneer in exploring issues relating to diversity and inclusion in the workplace from an Asian perspective. We were the first in the region to lead the conversation on topics such as culture, LGBT+ inclusion and mental health and have seen great progress in terms of corporate focus and attention in these areas. Now we are taking the lead to look at the deeply sensitive subject of religion in the workplace – one that few companies have the confidence to address.

In all our work, our goal is to lead, inspire and support companies to have a positive impact on people and communities. This goal applies equally to the topic of religious diversity.

As we seek to put religion on the corporate diversity and inclusion agenda, we acknowledge the sensitivities. We have grappled long and hard about whether, and how, to address this subject. We recognise that open discourse on a subject as historically, politically and personally sensitive as religion is a complex and difficult proposition, holding the potential for polarisation and tension in the workplace.

However, at the same time, we feel instinctively that it is a subject we cannot ignore. Religion is such a central part of identity in India that any discussion regarding diversity and inclusion in the workplace that does not reference religion, is incomplete. More importantly, we believe that fully acknowledging and embracing the richness of India's religious diversity is a unique source of strength that has the potential to set corporate India apart. In allowing employees to bring all aspects of their human identity to the workplace – including their religious affiliation, companies have the opportunity to bring a range of worldviews to the table in the pursuit of corporate excellence.

And although organisations may be nervous about talking openly about the sensitive issues that are often associated with this topic, it does not mean they do not exist. Given the strong affiliations that religious identity can create, few can deny – and the findings of our own Online Employee Survey illustrate – that religious bias exists in organisations, often negatively impacting organisational productivity, team cohesiveness and even individual employee wellbeing.

For Community Business, as champions of diversity and inclusion, the arguments in favour of opening the door to this conversation in the workplace far outweigh the option to continue to shy away, creating the opportunity for increased understanding and more trusting workplace relationships. The challenge is to do so in a way that is constructive and helpful. Mary-Frances Winters, one of our contributing experts, highlights the need to develop the skills to have bold and inclusive conversations. This calls for us to acknowledge differences, safely confront biases and stereotypes, identify common ground and shared meaning so that ultimately we can create stronger, more inclusive organisations.

Drawing on our wider work and informed by the local Indian context and examples, in this resource we seek to provide a set of practical recommendations for companies ready to take intentional steps to foster religious diversity and inclusion in the workplace in India.

We offer this research in the spirit of humility – being the first to recognise that we are not academic experts on religion and that our review of the context of religion in India is far from complete. Clearly there is much more to be understood and explored. But we offer it too in the hope that this work will have a positive impact: calling attention to the relevance of religious diversity in the Indian workplace and nudging open the door for conversation on this important subject in organisations, for the benefit of all.

We thank our Knowledge Partner, Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding and our Sponsor, Catalyst, for supporting this important work, and of course all the experts and corporate representatives who have taken the time to share their perspectives and insights – thank you for your partnership.

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Vijaya Matt
Country Head, India
Community Business



Kate Vernon
Executive Director
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FOREWORD

KNOWLEDGE PARTNER



“ As the CEO of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, it is a privilege to reflect back on the many years of partnership in which Tanenbaum and Community Business have engaged. Through numerous years, countries and projects, Tanenbaum has been proud to support Community Business’ endeavours – and this current body of research is no exception.

Tanenbaum promotes justice and builds respect for religious difference by transforming individuals and institutions to reduce prejudice, hatred and violence. Even as “workplaces” have evolved rapidly during the past year, this much remains true on a global scale – religious diversity needs to be part of our strategic approach to addressing diversity, equity and inclusion and, far too often, it is not.

For many, the concept of religious diversity sounds uniquely American and inapplicable to India. And yet, as with many aspects of identity and culture, it can be easier to see the relevance or applicability in other places than to see how those same or similar challenges are present in our own societies and workplaces. While religious diversity may look different in the United States or India, while we may use different terms to discuss or relate to it, we are all human and, therefore, we are each made up of complex identities.

When we arrive to the workplace, or join our colleagues online, we bring those complex identities with us. When we connect with our colleagues and clients, we do so from the lens of our lived experiences – which often includes a relationship with religion and/or spirituality, including perhaps through culture, practice, or belief. The more we intentionally increase our awareness of this lens, to consider the influence our identities and the complex identities of the people around us have on each other, the more respectful we can be to our colleagues and ourselves.

With this increased awareness comes increased responsibility. In the presence of the incredible data Community Business has gathered in this report, we can maximise our contributions in the workplace to the best of our teams’ abilities and increase overall satisfaction in our workplaces. Any risks far outweigh the opportunities to be gained.

With this report, you have a solid research base to start from, ideas to consider, and a uniquely Indian approach to addressing religious diversity to support you in your journey. We are humbled to be a knowledge partner for the development of this work.

”



Rev Mark Fowler
CEO
Tanenbaum

FOREWORD

SPONSOR



“ As a global nonprofit working with some of the world’s most powerful CEOs and leading companies to help build workplaces that work for women, Catalyst views diversity, equity and inclusion through an intersectional lens. Because gender diversity encompasses all other types of diversity, we are pleased to sponsor this pioneering research from Community Business on religious diversity and inclusion in India. This report echoes many of the key themes that Catalyst finds in our own research, including the importance of workplace environments where employees can bring their whole selves to work and the need for intentional, empathic, and courageous conversations on topics that may feel uncomfortable. If companies with operations in India can take these findings and the many practical recommendations provided in this report to heart, I am confident that they will ultimately be able to build more inclusive and productive workplaces where all employees can thrive. ”



Lorraine Hariton

President & CEO
Catalyst