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FASTING IN RAMADAN

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FASTING IN RAMADAN

Mehmet Ali was proud of himself to receive a recognition plaque from the institution where he has been working for 20 years. He had led numerous improvement projects as a shop floor group leader over the last ten years. While he was taking the plaque from Mr. Kumar, the new Indian Plant manager, many things passed through his mind. He felt lucky to be a part of this German-oriented automotive company and had learned much here. He had worked with many German managers and his work was always appreciated.

It had been just two months since Mr. Kumar had come to the company, and there was a lot of talk about him on the shop floor. The first thing he did was to offer an opinion that they should not call staff “employees” - but should be calling them "associates" Mehmet Ali thought that calling people who work for the company a different name meant nothing alone, all that mattered was how you treated them. However, interestingly, he had a very different and kind manner towards all the employees. Last week, he visited a project group meeting, working till the late hours of the night shift and bringing them some "Baklava,"¹ to motivate them and show appreciation for their hard work. He also joked that he was craving baklava before going to bed, but his wife did not allow it; that was why he was here at this time. However, Mehmet Ali, like many other colleagues, had some doubts about his sincerity. Although he seemed very kind and sensitive, he was the first Indian Plant Manager in the company's history, and it would take some time to get used to...

Mehmet Ali used to meet with Mr. Kumar at least three days of the week. Mr. Kumar’s morning routine was visiting the shop floor around 9:00 am for “go to Gemba” (shop floor meeting that that plant manager was also involved in) and listening to group presentations.



¹ Special delicious Turkish dessert. Made of filo pastry, filled with chopped nuts, and sweetened with syrup or honey. It was one of the most popular sweet pastries of Ottoman cuisine.



In one of these go to Gemba meetings, Mehmet Ali realized that Mr. Kumar looked tired. Mehmet Ali was also feeling exhausted because of the first-day fasting of Ramadan. It was even more difficult to fast during the long and hot summer days, as Ramadan came during the summer that year. This is a holy month for Muslims, to fast from sunrise to sunset to gain spiritual discipline and purification. Although this practice is hardly continued in workplaces, most shop floor employees choose to practice fasting during work, and company management respect this religious practice.

Mehmet Ali was concerned why Mr. Kumar looked so tired and offered him a cup of coffee before the presentation. However, he refused coffee because he was also fasting that day. Mehmet Ali was confused because he knew that he did not have any related religious beliefs. Mr. Kumar noticed his confusion and explained that he was fasting that day to understand what it was like and how they felt when fasting, so that he could understand his associates better.

On the same afternoon, by iftar², Mehmet Ali had had enough time to think about this situation. Mehmet Ali was highly affected by Mr. Kumar. Hunger made him more sensitive...He thought about his prejudice and doubts against Mr. Kumar. Mehmet Ali asked himself, "What am I fasting for?" According to his religion, one of the aims of fasting is to try to understand poor people...It is excellent, but "what about others?" "What do I know about Mr. Kumar? What do I know about his culture that he grew up in? What do I know about his beliefs, values..." He felt a different connection with him beyond work, company, etc. Mehmet Ali realized that he would learn so much from him.

Questions

What kind of leader/person is Mr. Kumar?

What kind of ways did Mr. Kumar use to learn about a different culture? What are the different ways of learning from other cultures?

What can be the different ways of showing cultural empathy to others?

What can be the barriers to developing cultural empathy for others?

What is Mehmet Ali's self-reflection about this situation?

How much do you consider yourself sensitive to other cultures?

² Iftar is the meal to break the fast after sunset



Recommended Reading

Lu, Y. E., Dane, B., & Gellman, A. (2005). An experiential model: Teaching empathy and cultural sensitivity. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 25*(3-4), 89-103.

Hollan, D. (2012). Emerging issues in the cross-cultural study of empathy. *Emotion Review, 4*(1), 70-78.

Duan, C., & Hill, C.E. (1996). The current state of empathy research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 43*(3), 261-274.



FASTING IN RAMADAN – TEACHING GUIDE

1. Synopsis

Mehmet was a senior blue-collar employee and team leader on the shop floor. Mr. Kumar has just come to the automotive company as a new plant manager. Since he is the first Indian plant manager in company history, Mehmet had prejudice and some doubts about Mr Kumar. During Ramadan, in one of the go-to Gemba (shop floor meeting that the plant manager is also involved in), Mehmet offered coffee to Mr. Kumar and learned that he was fasting that day to understand what it was like to fast and how they felt. However, he doesn't have any related religious beliefs. Mehmet was highly affected by this incident and reflected on his prejudice.

2. Teaching Strategy and Teaching Objectives

Students /learners will be able to:

- ✓ Understand cultural empathy/sensitivity and its aspects.
- ✓ Understand different ways of cultural empathy/sensitivity.
- ✓ Understand the barriers in developing cultural empathy
- ✓ Evaluate ourselves about how much we are sensitive to other cultures

3. Target Audience

- ✓ Undergraduate students in all business-related disciplines

4. Questions for Case Analysis and Teaching

What kind of leader/person is Mr. Kumar?

What kind of ways does Mr. Kumar use to learn a different culture? What can be the different ways of learning from other cultures?

What can be the different ways of showing cultural empathy to others?

What can be the barriers to developing cultural empathy for others?

What is Mehmet Ali's self-reflection about this situation?

How much do you consider yourself sensitive to other cultures?

5. Recommended Reading

Lu, Y. E., Dane, B., & Gellman, A. (2005). An experiential model: Teaching empathy and cultural sensitivity. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 25(3-4), 89-103.

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Duan, C., & Hill, C.E. (1996). The current state of empathy research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 43(3), 261-274.



FASTING IN RAMADAN – TEACHING NOTES

1. Summary of case study

Mehmet was a senior blue-collar employee and team leader on the shop floor. Mr. Kumar has just come to the automotive company as a new plant manager. Since he is the first Indian plant manager in company history, Mehmet had prejudice and some doubts about Mr. Kumar. During Ramadan, in one of the go-to Gemba (shop floor meeting that the plant manager is also involved in), Mehmet offered coffee to Mr. Kumar and learned that he was fasting that day to understand what it was like to fast and how they felt. However, he doesn't have any related religious beliefs. Mehmet was highly affected by this incident and reflected on his prejudice.

2. Suggested methodology for 'solving' case study

- ✓ **Before the discussion**, some warm-up questions may prepare students for the discussion (Assignment questions before the case)

-What do you think about the case?

-Do you like the topic?

- ✓ **Open the discussion**

The discussion can be started with following questions.

-What kind of leader/person is Mr. Kumar?

-What kind of ways does Mr. Kumar use to learn a different culture? What can be the different ways of learning from other cultures?

With the help of these questions, Mr Kumar's personal and leadership characteristics can be discussed, and his ability to be sensitive to different cultures and his empathetic attitude can be emphasized. The concept and dimensions of "cultural empathy" can be defined by giving examples on the behaviour of Mr. Kumar.

- ✓ **Advance the discussion**

The discussion can be deepened by the following questions.

What can be the different ways of showing cultural empathy to others?

What can be the barriers to developing cultural empathy for others?

What is Mehmet Ali's self-reflection about this situation?



With the help of these questions, cultural empathy behaviour may be embodied by discussing different ways of showing cultural empathy/sensitivity and the barriers in developing cultural empathy.

✓ **Close the discussion (15 min)**

At the end of the discussion, participants can be encouraged to reflect on themselves. How well do they have the skill of cultural empathy and how can they develop this skill?

How much do you consider yourself sensitive to other cultures?

3. Possible answers (please provide possible solutions/ answers to the case study)

Kumar is an Indian manager and has the collectivist characteristics and values of eastern culture. He takes a we-orientated approach rather than a me-oriented approach as a management style. He is very kind and sensitive towards all employees.

“The first thing he did was to offer an opinion that they should not call staff “employees” - but should be calling them “associates”....”

Mr. Kumar knows the value of being on the shop floor as a visible and accessible leader. By making frequent production site visits, he motivates employees and provides feedback from the field. His communication with the workers is friendly and sometimes playful. These features increase his ability to communicate easily and empathize.

“Last week, he visited a project group meeting, working till the late hours of the night shift and bringing them some “Baklava,”³ to motivate them and show appreciation for their hard work. He also joked that he was craving baklava before going to bed, but his wife did not allow it; that was why he was here at this time.”

Mr. Kumar tries to understand the new foreign culture he has just joined, so he tries to be in contact with the employees as much as possible. He is also aware that the new culture he is in has different beliefs and practices from his own culture and that these cannot be separated from the business environment.

He thinks that the best way to adapt a new culture is “practice”. For this reason, even though it does not belong to his own belief, he fasted for one day with the Muslim employees in Ramadan.

Although practicing a culture is one of the most powerful ways to show cultural empathy, there can be other ways. For example, it can also be achieved by watching documentaries, reading academic articles, or asking questions to people from different cultural backgrounds.

During the case Mr. Kumar is a good example of cultural empathy, however, the shop floor group leader, Mehmet Ali, is not. At the end of the case, Mehmet Ali realizes that the most

³ Special delicious Turkish dessert. Made of filo pastry, filled with chopped nuts, and sweetened with syrup or honey. It was one of the most popular sweet pastries of Ottoman cuisine.



important obstacle in front of his cultural empathy is his prejudice to differences. When he moves beyond his prejudices against Kumar, the process of empathizing begins for Mehmet Ali. Mehmet Ali actually learned the behaviour of cultural empathy by role modelling his manager.

Hunger made him more sensitive...He thought about his prejudice and doubts against Mr. Kumar. Mehmet Ali asked himself, "What am I fasting for?" According to his religion, one of the aims of fasting is to try to understand poor people....It is excellent, but "what about others?" "What do I know about Mr. Kumar? What do I know about his culture that he grew up in? What do I know about his beliefs, values..." He felt a different connection with him beyond work, company, etc. Mehmet Ali realized that he would learn so much from him.

