

Engaging Interfaith Diversity In Corporate America



**IFYC as a Pathway for Multiple
Identities in the Workforce**

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**ENGAGING INTERFAITH DIVERSITY IN CORPORATE AMERICA:
IFYC AS A PATHWAY FOR MULTIPLE IDENTITIES IN THE WORKFORCE**

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Capstone Project

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DEDICATIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In my early 30s, I took up the sport of marathon running. I once thought that running 26.2 consecutive miles would be the hardest race I would ever run – that was until I enrolled in this doctoral program at Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College. For almost three years, I have been training on the road with my incredible classmates and faculty toward achieving this lifelong dream.

As with any success one achieves in life, there are far more people who deserve credit than the one who receives any accolades. In my case, there are many. While listing them all would take more pages than the capstone itself, I would be remiss if I did not shine a spotlight on the following:

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I conclude this program grateful, inspired, humbled and ready to take all of this incredible knowledge and put it to good use.

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Executive Summary

This capstone explored the possibilities of interfaith engagement in the corporate sector of the United States of America. Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) was founded in 2002 with the belief that young people cooperating across faith traditions and worldviews could harness the best values of these traditions to tackle some of the most vexing issues in society. As the organization neared two decades of existence, IFYC leadership sought to expand its theory of change by bringing its program of interfaith engagement to the corporate sector.

An initial assessment of interfaith engagement in the corporate arena underscored the need for greater understanding in this area. A review of the Fortune 100, the largest companies in revenue and reach, demonstrates that a small percentage of the companies include religion or interfaith engagement in their approach to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA). Many corporations have no reference to religion or interfaith engagement outside of a federally mandated mention that no employee will be discriminated upon based on religious belief. IFYC sought to understand whether its program of interfaith engagement might be appealing to corporations who either wanted to include interfaith cooperation and dialogue in IDEA programs or who were open to training and education to unlock deeper employee engagement or to realize some greater corporate strategy.

Based on the problem of practice, organizational context, literature review, and conceptual frameworks, my research was guided by this primary question: Under what conditions might corporations engage in a program of interfaith engagement with their employee base using IFYC's theory of change?

This study utilized qualitative research that relied on interviews and focus groups alongside a content analysis of Fortune 100 websites to better guide the creation of research questions. Data collection occurred in three parts: 1) interviews with IFYC organizational leaders to gauge the current program frame, and thoughts and concerns about a potential foray into the corporate space alongside an internal

IFYC document review; 2) a content analysis of all 100 of the Fortune 100's websites to ascertain whether and to what extent religion or interfaith engagement were a part of policy or practice; and 3) interviews with representatives of Fortune 100 corporations in the nation.

All questions were constructed using Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) and specifically a typology of resource utilization that links the ways in which managers and subordinates harness multiple identities to achieve greater resource exploitation and production. Using this frame, I explored whether religion or interfaith engagement might be a possible inclusionary strategy to produce different levels of resources that could benefit employer and employee, providing a strong indicator to IFYC that its program expansion into this space may be beneficial and needed.

Findings from this analysis demonstrated that unlike other areas of IDEA, corporations in the sample set engage religion or interfaith diversity far less and most do not have a clear strategy on how to tackle the issue as part of a broader diversity agenda. While all interviewed organizations acknowledge the EEOC mandate to protect against religious discrimination, few engaged in a robust program of religious inclusion and interfaith engagement. Legal and reputational risks, along with a lack of understanding and leadership capabilities, were cited as among the biggest barriers. Having a resource to understand how to engage religious or interfaith diversity and securing assistance managing risk was seen as a key to entering this space.

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations were proposed to IFYC for its future consideration:

- Recommendation 1: IFYC should strengthen its consulting practice to help corporations include interfaith engagement as part of a “collective identity” agenda.
- Recommendation 2: IFYC should create an easy-to-use manual for corporations and managers on how to understand the cultural sensitivity of major religious holidays and practices through the lens of employee belonging.
- Recommendation 3: IFYC should create a suite of workshops and trainings to help corporations with employee engagement, risk mitigation, and enhancing diversity and leadership programs.
- Recommendation 4: IFYC should define the value proposition for interfaith engagement as part of a broader business imperative.

Introduction

On September 11, 2001, terrorists flew commercial airliners into the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington, DC, and, due to the intervention of passengers, a less high-profile location in rural Pennsylvania. When tragedy of any kind strikes, human beings have a natural tendency to look for answers, sometimes in the form of “who to blame.” In relatively short order, popular media and society in the United States labeled the terrorists as “Muslim extremists,” painting the face of a religion onto a canvas of devastation. In that same year, Dr. Eboo Patel founded Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) with the goal of harnessing the best in various faith traditions and worldviews to unify young people at time when religion was seen as one of great dividers of our time. Now after 20 years of honing a theory of change predominately on college campuses, Patel and IFYC see an expanded opportunity: to take the organization’s expertise in interfaith engagement to the large campuses of corporate America.

As the organization engaged in planning for its third decade of existence, it saw and described a world perhaps even more polarized than in the days following September 11. A 2020 study co-authored by researchers at Brown University and Stanford University showed that political and social polarization has grown rapidly in the past 40 years, splitting among ideological, racial and religious lines (Boxell et al., 2021). This comes alongside an era in which issues of inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) are being more expansively considered than perhaps any time in recent memory. Absent from many places in the IDEA discussion, however, is the notion of religious or interfaith inclusion. This provides a unique opportunity for IFYC.

IFYC sees America at its best through the metaphor of a potluck, a social gathering where everyone brings their best gifts to make a unified meal, but it also describes its primarily singular focus on higher education as too limiting to have the impact that it wants. IFYC has theorized that an expansion of its program of interfaith engagement into the day-to-day workforce will allow the organization to expand its



impact and chart a more expansive organizational vision of an “Interfaith America” where “people of different faiths, worldviews, and traditions bridge divides and find common values to build a shared life together.”

The purpose of this research is to ascertain the extent to which interfaith engagement currently exists in corporate programs and policies, to better understand the obstacles and opportunities for IFYC to successfully operate in this space, and to provide a beginning roadmap for IFYC to successfully engage its theory of change in the corporate arena.

Organizational Context

INTERFAITH YOUTH CORE

Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) is a national non-profit working toward an America where people of different faiths, worldviews, and traditions can bridge differences and find common values to build a shared life together (IFYC vision statement, ifyc.org). The idea for IFYC occurred at an interfaith symposium in 1998 when Patel, the organization's founder, pondered three foundational questions:

1. Why do modern narratives about religion seem to always focus on conflict?
2. Why do these stories constantly feature young people?
3. In one of the most religiously diverse societies in world history, why isn't there a movement of young people of different faiths and worldviews using their shared values as a bridge to connect and cooperate on shared concerns like poverty, human rights, or climate change?¹

Looking at these questions, Patel set out to build an interfaith youth movement using service to bring together people who might disagree on ultimate truths but share a commitment to improve their world. IFYC incorporated as a 501(c)3 non-profit in 2002 in the wake of the September 11th attacks on the United States, a time when interfaith cooperation was perhaps most needed but least supported. The organization slowly created formal programs, launched campaigns, and convened national gatherings where hundreds showed up. Between 2003 and 2011, IFYC tripled its staff and launched programs ranging from interfaith service around Chicago to dialogue initiatives in the Middle East, South Africa, and India. They partnered with the Clinton Global Initiative and Queen Rania of Jordan to create an international exchange program. IFYC collaborated with the Tony Blair Faith Foundation to develop a fellows program that brought together young leaders to serve as interfaith ambassadors to

¹ From ifyc.org/about

the United Nations, focusing on malaria. Patel was asked to speak at the 16th Nobel Peace Prize Forum, and he and IFYC were profiled by major media outlets. During this time, IFYC also began to see unique breakthroughs on college and university campuses, which led the organization to see campuses as laboratories for diverse civil society, and a place for rising leaders to tackle the hardest questions of diversity and difference in the 21st century.

The organization developed a theory of change that interfaith engagement could lessen divisions in all sectors of the world with college and university campuses as the conduit, believing that this is where emerging leaders could be found that could steer broadscale cultural change. Not only did the college experience provide a natural setting for engaging with complex ideas, but IFYC also saw it as a natural laboratory where issues of diversity – including interfaith diversity – and difference are probed intellectually and lived up close. As IFYC notes in its literature, “It’s an environment that can model the highest ideals of civil society alongside some of the most divisive conflicts that we’re grappling with as a nation.” To date, IFYC has created a network of more than 100,000 interfaith participants on more than 600 U.S. college and university campuses, where it organizes interfaith groups and service projects, convenes and trains students and educators, and is establishing a growing academic field of interfaith studies.

As IFYC’s presence on college and university campuses grew, the organization began strategy sessions in 2020 and 2021, exploring the possibility of expanding beyond the higher education space. Patel and IFYC’s senior leadership team noted that while there were many more higher education organizations with which to partner, the organization was eager to create a more expansive theory of change, believing that expanding to other segments of society might accelerate the use of interfaith engagement to solve greater divisions in the nation.

In 2021, IFYC hired The Raben Group, a national public policy and strategic communications group, to explore the branding implications of expanding beyond higher education, particularly in the field of public health and the corporate arena. The Raben Group’s work focused on overall brand and structural identity. My research seeks to understand the opportunities and potential obstacles for IFYC entering the corporate space, specifically. This project seeks to inform the viability of engaging “corporate America” in interfaith exploration.

The Raben Group’s work with IFYC through 2021 included a series of stakeholder interviews in philanthropy, media, higher education, religious leadership, and other thought leadership spaces to inform the organization on the question of an expanded institutional identity and purpose, including assessing opinions about IFYC’s

name, mission and vision. From that exploration and through a series of internal planning sessions, IFYC will change its organizational identity in mid-2022 to “Interfaith America,” with the goal of encapsulating the desired expansion of its work and amplifying the organization’s values and message. As part of that re-assessment process, the organization will refine its vision to state: “Religious diversity is a foundational American strength. Interfaith America is building a nation that achieves that promise for the common good.” Its mission will be restated from the previous “Our mission is to partner with colleges and universities working to turn religious diversity into a positive force in our society.” to “Interfaith America’s mission is to inspire, equip, and connect leaders and institutions to unlock the potential of America’s religious diversity.”²² This name change and related mission and vision change will not be public until after the completion of my research. As such, I will continue to refer to the organization as IFYC throughout this study.

This research takes on added significance to the organization as it seeks to decide the pathway by which engagement with corporations might be a part of this expanded mission and vision.

Problem of Practice

IFYC’s approach to college and universities is well established, and the organization is now seeking additional ways to leverage its model of interfaith engagement to additional sectors. The organization’s leadership is particularly interested in engagement with corporations in the United States. IFYC believes that it is the right time to expand its programming to corporations for three reasons:

1. Corporations have shown an increased interest in diversity issues, but IFYC believes that there is a gap in programming and approaches that address religious diversity or interfaith engagement;
2. Given the vast resources and geographic reach of many corporations, IFYC believes that it can engage a larger population through the vehicle of the corporate workforce; and
3. To the extent that IFYC is effective in engaging a corporate workforce, it believes it might be a strong partner for participating corporations to engage their consumers, thus amplifying its theory of change even more broadly.

² From IFYC planning presentation to staff, September 7, 2021.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

While IFYC believes its theory of change could dramatically expand through engagement with the corporate sector, this is a population and a sector with which the organization has limited experience and does not yet fully understand. IFYC has succeeded in its higher education program because it took the time to understand the higher education landscape and modeled its program to be complementary to it. Seeking to replicate that same approach with corporations, IFYC wants to better understand the corporate environment to tailor any programmatic approach. To meet these needs, this study focuses on identifying IFYC's value to this new constituent group and seeks to better understand the opportunities and obstacles that prospective corporate partners might see in such an engagement.

CORPORATE AMERICA AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

“Religion and spirituality have in the past been seen as a private matter with little or no place in corporate America,” cites the opening of a 2008 report by the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2008) that looked at the role of religion in the workplace. The report notes that as companies embrace an expanding global economy and increase their sourcing of global job candidates, religious diversity in the workplace is rising. In addition, a growing number of employees are taking their religion and spirituality to work. “Religion and spirituality, for many employees, are no longer a part of their lives that they leave at home. Spirituality for these employees is a way of life—their religion and spirituality define who they are” (SHRM, 2008).

That report followed a SHRM survey of a random sample (n=543) of its members about religious accommodation in the workplace. Participants represented companies of different sizes, sectors (e.g., public and private for-profits, nonprofits, government), and locations (U.S.-based or multinational). The survey yielded three takeaways that paint a picture of the ways in which corporate America views religious diversity in the workplace: 1) members said that training managers and supervisors on anti-harassment and discrimination policies should not be limited to race, ethnicity, age and gender, but also include religion; 2) religion and spirituality education efforts in the workplace need to shift from minimizing differences to strengthening, respecting and valuing those differences to help drive an organization's business results; and 3) 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 (SHRM, 2008).

That report, now almost 15 years old, painted a picture of where a sampling of human resource managers believed corporate America needed to go, but what is the reality in 2022? The Religious Freedom and Business Foundation is dedicated to educating the global business community, policymakers, non-government organizations and consumers about the positive power that faith and religious freedom for all (including those with no religious faith) has on business and the economy. The organization launched a benchmark survey of the Fortune 200 to gauge the most faith-and-belief friendly corporate workplaces among the 200 largest companies in America, resulting in the Corporate Religious Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Index (<https://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/redi>). The 2021 survey demonstrated that while religious diversity is not as universally included in the Fortune 200's IDEA policies, it is gaining increased attention, particularly among the tech sector.

According to a 2013 survey conducted by the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, a secular, non-sectarian, nonprofit organization dedicated to combating religious prejudice, more than one-third (36%) of workers say they have personally experienced or witnessed some form of religious non-accommodation in the workplace. Participants in the survey said that “discomfort and avoidance” characterize the approach to religion in the workplace for many outside the Christian majority. Roughly half of companies represented in the survey have moderate to high social diversity, and in these contexts religious conflict and non-accommodation are more prevalent. According to the Tanenbaum survey, less than half of workers agree that their companies offer the following:

- Flexible work hours to permit religious observance or prayer (44%);
- Materials explaining the company's religious discrimination policy (42%);
- Policy allowing employees to “swap holidays” (21%); and/or
- Programs that teach employees about religious diversity (14%).

The intersection of the SHRM survey and the REDI shows a potential opening for IFYC as it contemplates entering the corporate arena. As SHRM managers cite a need for increased training and Tanenbaum cites a lack of training and supports, IFYC may be able to fill a void while expanding its theory of change.

IFYC'S EXPANDED THEORY OF CHANGE

IFYC uses the image of a “potluck nation,” where the contributions of all are welcomed and create greater good for all. While the Tannenbaum study notes the still often clear separation of “church and state” in the corporate space, IFYC argues that “in an interfaith America, people of different faiths, worldviews, and traditions bridge

divides and find common values to build a shared life together” (IFYC, five-year plan, 2021). IFYC points to the United States’ founding framework of religious liberty without state religion and posits that it is precisely this lack of a prescribed state religion that allows religious diversity to thrive. The organization further notes that religious diversity can be used as a tool to advance common life and democratic vitality.

As part of the effort to understand how IFYC might engage its theory of change with corporations, it is important to ascertain whether its model might fit the ecosystem of corporate America.

IFYC declares in its new five-year strategic overview that “religious diversity is a mere sociological fact” that cannot be ignored. In the United States, they note, people who hold diverse faiths and philosophical commitments share and comprise a single society. IFYC seeks to reflect religious pluralism in all its programs, which the organization defines as:

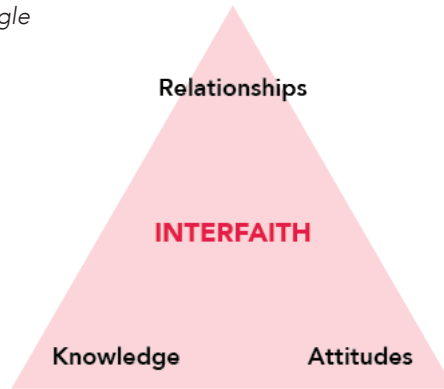
- Respect for diverse identities;
- Relationships across lines of difference; and
- Commitment to the common good.

IFYC defines common good through the lens of what the organization calls civic goods, which IFYC believes are realized by:

- Increasing understanding and reducing prejudice;
- Strengthening social cohesion and reducing the chances for identity-based conflict;
- Bridging social capital and addressing social problems;
- Fostering the continuity of identity communities and reducing isolation; and
- Creating binding narratives for diverse societies.

IFYC believes that these principles might create a strategic advantage to corporations by allowing companies to build stronger relationships among its employee base, helping them learn about one another and engage in common action. IFYC define this as the Interfaith Triangle, an approach and output which this study seeks to determine the prospective appeal of for corporate partners. (see Figure 1).

IFYC outlines its understanding of interfaith cooperation as a triangle with three core components: knowledge, relationships and attitudes. It defines knowledge as appreciative knowledge, or knowledge due to a desire to understand the other. The organization believes that this creates an openness to relationships with people who may be different from one another. It closes the triangle by articulating that if one has

Figure 1*IFYC's Interfaith Triangle*

an appreciative knowledge that allows one to be in relationship with someone who may be different, it leads to more positive attitudes toward that religion and its adherents. IFYC believes each of these three tenets are essential to interfaith cooperation.

Literature Review

For much of its history, the United States has drawn a deep firewall between religion and the more secular nature of the corporate workplace. For the purposes of this study, the term religion and the concept of religious practices will be defined using Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.) which uses the following definitions:

1. "Religion is not limited to traditional, organized religions, but also includes religious beliefs that are practiced by a small group of people and are not part of a formal church or sect; and
2. "Religious observances or practices include, for example, attending worship services, praying, wearing religious garb or symbols, displaying religious objects, adhering to certain dietary rules, proselytizing or other forms of religious expression, or refraining from certain activities."

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 further declares that an employer may not discriminate based on religion unless that employer demonstrates that it is unable to reasonably accommodate a particular religious practice or doing so would harm the business (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.). This balance of avoiding religious discrimination and protecting the operation of a business is at the heart of this research project. If IFYC wants to serve the corporate segment, the organization must understand under what circumstances engaging religion or inter-

faith interaction honors this balance. To do so, it must also understand the reasons that there is a deep sense of risk beyond the legal sides of this definition.

The changing nature of the workforce may provide a timely backdrop for a renewed examination of this issue. According to a study by the Society for Human Resource Management, companies are embracing an increasingly global economy, which is also increasing their sourcing of global job candidates, venturing into other cultures where religion is not sequestered as strongly from work life (SHRM, 2008). This is combined with a changing nature of the U.S. workforce, which is populated by an increasing number of immigrants and multicultural participants. As those companies move beyond the traditional U.S. marketplace, issues of religious diversity are coming to the fore (SHRM, 2008).

Backing up against this economic transition is an increasing discussion of all areas of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility in the United States. While diversity identity categories such as gender/gender expression, race, sexual orientation, and other forms have found a foothold in corporate America, religious diversity has not received as deep an examination -- and yet religion is often central to individual and group identity (Seul, 1999; Tracey, 2012).

Religious diversity in the workplace has become a critical social issue of our time, according to a Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding Report (Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, 2016). While religion has influenced some key movement in business – the fair-trade movement, social enterprise and social business movements, and an emphasis on corporate social responsibility – fertile ground remains for research on the effect of religious beliefs on traditionally secular institutions like business (Tracey, 2012).

Likewise, the intersection of religion and organizational management is still a nascent area of research compared to other areas of diversity in the workplace (Claire et al., 2005). The majority of research concerning diversity in the workplace has followed more easily observable traits such as race, gender and age, while religion has been assigned a subset of “deep-level diversity,” -- which looks at issues such as attitudes, values and beliefs (Gebert et al., 2014) -- or “non-visible diversity,” which includes items like religion, national origin or sexual orientation (Claire et al, 2005).

Heliot et al. (2020) indicate that the concept of identity is at the heart of workplace diversity and that religion cannot be excluded from the list of traits when considering diversity issues at work. The notion of identity is tied to the desire to be one’s authentic self, which includes a synergy between one’s internal values and the external expression of those values (Heliot et al, 2020). A significant body of identity research in the diversity space addresses ways in which people alter or suppress core

identities that may be received negatively. Dutton et al. (2010), however, note that allowing for greater inclusion of one's "whole self" can lead to overall positive identity in the workplace that produces dividends for both employer and employee.

As IFYC looks to engage with the corporate arena, there are few similar models that it might look to understand how to successfully construct such an approach. While this area of deep-level diversity may be a newer topic, an examination of the Workplace Spirituality Movement (WPS) exposes possible benefits and pitfalls of religion or interfaith inclusion in the corporate workforce. WPS explores how individuals seek deep personal meaning through work and also examines how one's individual religious or spiritual expressions are incorporated into the workplace (Bradley-Geist, 2016). This initial body of work led to a listing of benefits and opportunities for religious inclusion in the workplace.

In this study, I specifically explore the notion of accommodation of religion and interfaith engagement in the workplace. I also outline literature that points to positive strategic outputs for corporations that engage with religion or interfaith issues. Lastly, I note the significant risks and obstacles to such inclusion and lay out some considerations to explore in my research.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Gelb and Longacre (2012) outline emerging models of ways that corporations can accommodate religious expression while harnessing its benefits. The most common issues of accommodation include accounting for employees' religious beliefs when planning holiday events, allowing religious decorations in individual workspaces, and permitting flexible schedules to accommodate religious practices at work

Table 1

Cash and Gray's Framework for Accommodating Religion and Spirituality at Work
(Cash & Gray, 2000, p. 131)

Categories of Requests	Examples of Requests	Factors to consider in accommodating requests
Observance requests (Outside of the workplace)	Holidays, rituals or event, sabbath days, leave of absence	Does the employee have available leave time? Will workflow be substantially affected? Will employee productivity significantly decline? Will the company be unable to meet production of service needs?
Manifestation requests (At work)	Dress, symbols, proselytizing, informal meetings	Will overall employee relations suffer? Will employee productivity substantially decrease? Will employee or customer safety be jeopardized? Will customer relations suffer significantly?

(SHRM, 2018). This can be balanced with overall corporate needs while preventing an “undue hardship” – defined as anything beyond *de minimis*, meaning that the company should not be expected to incur more than very little in terms of cost (Findley et al., 2014). Others cite a proactive approach to providing respectful space for religious diversity as a way of creating overall cohesion among the workforce, thereby providing a benefit to all employees (Sekerka & Yacobian, 2018).

Alongside accommodating religious expression, should individuals feel more comfortable moving from a place of deep-level diversity, there is a growing need to find ways to express one’s religious identity in the workplace (Gebert et al., 2014).

Cash and Gray (2000) note that there is a way to make space for accommodating religious belief in the workplace while also acknowledging an equally needed commitment to protect employees for whom religion is not important or may be perceived as hostile. They raise important factors to consider when looking at setting up a system of religious accommodation (see Table 1).

OPPORTUNITIES AND USE AS A STRATEGIC TOOL

As IFYC seeks to create a model for corporate engagement, the literature notes several benefits that the organization might cite in advocating partnership to corporations. In today’s knowledge/creative economy, companies need true diversity to unlock creativity and prosper (Friedman et al., 2016).

Implementation of programs like those that could be offered by IFYC, combined with policy structures that support deep-level organizational diversity, could enhance a corporation’s capacity for success through increased profitability, creativity, flexibility, successful fluctuations in the market, and overall organizational growth (Downey et al., 2015). Corporations that value cultural diversity are more innovative, as that process of valuing allows employees to harness creativity that comes through engaging differences and transform it into useful ideas, products and services, thereby capitalizing on the inclusion of the emerging global workforce (Lambert, 2016). Furthermore, religious and interfaith inclusion can include deepened employee engagement and overall emotional stability on the job (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2009).

The practice of much work in today’s corporate environment relies increasingly on a team-focused approach. Collections of individuals from a variety of backgrounds often bring diverse tools which can outperform collections of non-diverse “high ability” individuals at problem solving and predictive tasks. The intersection of diverse workforces and team-based work is one more reason to leverage religious diversity as an asset (Page, 2007). Cash and Gray (2000) add that including religious diversity can have several universal benefits, including promoting general awareness of a col-

league, discussing the impact of religious stereotypes on morale and productivity and looking at religious discrimination as an impediment to teamwork and cohesion.

UNLOCKING STRATEGY THROUGH CONSERVATION OF RESOURCES THEORY

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory acknowledges that people are motivated to accumulate resources to obtain individual and collective goals (Bickerton & Miner, 2021). The theory looks at the ways in which people avoid losing or gaining resources as a key motivational driver. Patel and Cunningham (2012) note that involvement in religion is seen as a psychological gain, and Creary et al. (2015) acknowledge that allowing a person's multiple identities to be harnessed can be seen as a key and desirous "energy resource" that can unlock success.

COR Theory indicates that the knowledge and social capital that individuals have developed as members of different social identity groups are potentially valuable resources at work (Creary et al, 2015). Religion is often described as a key social identity category (Greenfield & Marks, 2008).

Managing employees' multiple identities – the makeup of an employees' various characteristics, including one's faith tradition – can allow employees to access valuable resources (i.e., social capital and knowledge) for work-based tasks and activities (Creary et al., 2015).

Understanding the impact of religion in the workplace has increased due to the change in demographic structure of societies, globalization and the internationalization of business. Harnessing the diverse characteristics of employees can lead to positive effects of diversity such as enhanced decision making, innovation, creativity, and a wider pool of qualified individuals (Thomson, 2010).

Cox and Blake (1991) note that increased cultural diversity unlocks resources like creativity and innovation that can be used to solve complex problems facing corporations today. Cultural diversity includes multiple identities of individuals, including different faith traditions (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Managing a culturally diverse employee base can provide resources to both the employers and employees, including a competitive advantage in recruiting, increased creativity, increased problem-solving with the company and fostering an environment of flexibility that can help in a constantly changing marketplace (Cox & Blake, 1991).

Additionally, specifically building interfaith understanding is in the interest of global business, according to the 2014 publication "Business: A Powerful Force for Supporting Interfaith Understanding and Peace," by the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation (RFBF, 2014). RFBF research shows that positively engaging reli-

religious identity can help businesses build trust and respect among both employees and consumers, which can give companies a marketplace advantage. The report also highlights how business activities provide common ground to bridge religious differences among workers, which can lead to entrepreneurship within the business.

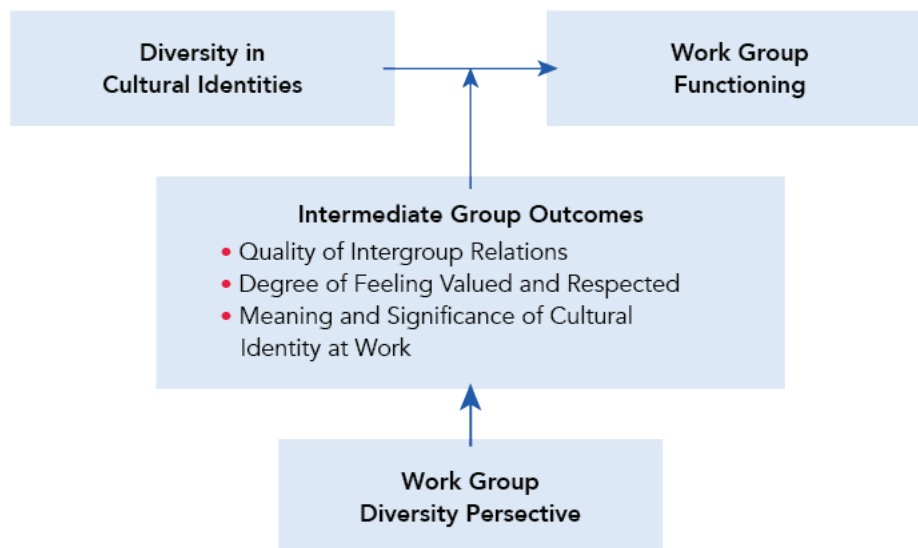
Ely and Thomas (2001) outline group benefits such as increased intergroup relations, belonging and meaning through engaging more broadly in cultural identity diversity (see Figure 2).

Ely and Thomas (2001) link culturally diverse teams at work with resource generation through innovative thinking that can lead to outputs that advance both a corporation's mission and an employee's perceived value. Using an integration-and-learning perspective, their research links to COR Theory in that including multiple identities in the workplace can proactively produce mutually beneficial resources for both employer and employee. They specifically indicate that this perspective harnesses cultural diversity as a driver for learning and adaptive change (Ely & Thomas, 2001).

This study seeks to build from COR Theory a framework for corporations to understand how diversity, including religious diversity and interfaith engagement, might be implemented in the corporate setting by harnessing multiple-identity management into a greater resource outputs for both the employee and the corporation.

Figure 2

Relationship between cultural identity diversity and work group functioning (Ely & Thomas, p. 236)



RISKS

While the literature indicates possible benefits of religious or interfaith inclusion, the engagement of religion and interfaith interaction can also be fraught with risks for corporations, both inside the corporate culture and outside.

According to a 2018 survey, 72 percent of Americans say that religion is important in their lives (Gallup, 2018). Many Americans also often view religion as a topic that is not fit for the workplace, citing interpersonal conflicts, negative job tensions among work peers and legal conflicts as possible outcomes (Piyawan et al., 2020).

Cash and Gray (2000) note the need to be conscious of the impact on customers who encounter overt religious expression, the impact on other employees who may not welcome any expression of religion in the workplace, and ways that accommodations might impact the functioning of the organization.

While there are risks associated with allowing an employee's faith tradition to enter the workplace, there are also risks that religious inclusion can be used as a form of manipulation against an employee (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2009). Workplace programs that allow for religious inclusion can be used as a tool of instrumentality, Lips-Wiersma et al. (2009) argue, by twisting religious accommodation into a vehicle of organizational control. It can put pressure on employees whose managers espouse overt religious expression by making them feel as if they have to make space in their own lives for, or openness to, specific belief systems to be in favor with managers. Corporate instruments such as employee resource groups (ERGs) can be used as a tool of manipulation, with corporations citing their inclusion as a sign that other accommodations are not necessary or that religious discrimination cannot be present as the company clearly supports its inclusion.

Furthermore, there can be external brand issues for companies if allowing religious expression moves beyond embracing an individual employees' needs at work. From pharmacists who refuse to fill prescriptions that go against their religious beliefs to bakers and website designers who declare they do not need to offer services that conflict with their religion, there are many examples of the ways in which touching this "third rail" might be ill-advised for corporations (Heliot et al., 2020).

Ironically, allowing religious expression at work as part of a broader diversity portfolio can sometimes increase religious discrimination, especially if a religious group is favored, causing both morale and potential legal issues (Heliot et al., 2020).

In all instances, Cash and Grow (2000) note, there is a need to establish criteria that balance workers' rights to religious expression against other employees' rights to not have religion intrude into their work, space, etc. if not welcome, and to protect the corporation overall.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AT WORK/TRAINING & EDUCATION

IFYC's notion of a religious pluralism closely aligns with Hicks' (2003) concept of a "respectful pluralism at work." In this workplace context, Hicks contends that religious inclusion at work has to respect the dignity of all members, from those who choose to express their religious identities to those who may claim no religious identity at all. Heliot et al (2020) outline that this respectful pluralism at work requires mutual respect among colleagues, a sense of safety for all, and requires a formal program of training and discussion to help employees understand the intersection of religious and work identities.

Sekerka and Yacobian (2018) argue that workshops alone will not lead to a system of mutual respect; they indicate that organizations that wish to engage across religious difference need to create "safe spaces" for all employees through a culture of "organizational learning" that focuses more on uncovering beliefs through stereotypes and other cultural biases.

SUMMARY AND CONCERNS TO ADDRESS

While a strong case might be made for the benefits of understanding religious diversity in the corporate space, IFYC must be conscious of the cited concerns among many human resources executives about inclusion of religion in the workplace. Many workplace policies view religious inclusion primarily as an issue of accommodation versus a strategic tool of strength (Thomson, 2010). There is a small but growing body of literature that examines the influence of religion on ethics, management values, job stress, job satisfaction, acculturation into the American workforce, and diversity. These are all points to probe as IFYC seeks to better understand the corporate landscape.

As corporations seek to better understand the ways in which diversity can be seen as a strength, emerging research on the multiple identities that employees possess would also enhance IFYC's approach. Allowing for the person's full identity to be engaged in the workplace, including one's religious identity, can provide access to knowledge and social capital resources that can be utilized for work-based tasks and activities (Creary et al., 2015).

Central to IFYC's success in engaging in the corporate arena will be making the case that the benefits of interfaith engagement outweigh the risks of breaking what some see as "church-state" firewall or the secular nature of the corporate setting. Part of IFYC's problem of practice in endeavoring to move its model to the corporate sector will be to examine how it might need to alter that model to meet the needs of businesses. One central element of this will be the ways in which IFYC addresses the

traditional notion of this firewall between religion and the traditionally secular corporate workplace.

Conceptual Framework

This study seeks to better understand the conditions under which corporations might engage in a program of religion or interfaith inclusion. My research used Creary et al.'s (2015) typology of resource utilization, which links the ways in which managers and subordinates utilize multiple identities to achieve greater resource exploitation and production (see Figure 3). The frame explores the ways in which exclusionary and inclusionary strategies produce different levels of resources that might benefit employer and employee.

Inclusionary strategies are defined as those that embrace an employee's multiple identities in work-based activities while exclusionary strategies seek to suppress or declare irrelevant a particular aspect of a person's multiple identities (Creary et al., 2015). When managers and employees both pursue inclusionary strategies, greater resources are produced. For the purposes of this study, I will explore how including or excluding the identity of religion or interfaith understanding might impact output for employees and employers in the corporate space.

While IFYC's theory of change is not intended solely to advance employee output, in the traditional sense of employees "doing more", this frame focuses on the ways in which Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory is beneficial to both employee and employer, a key part of the value proposition IFYC will need to develop to be successful. Specifically, it outlines inclusionary strategies that look at how using multiple identities, including religion or interfaith engagement, might lead to benefits to both employer – advancing work-based tasks – and employee – an increased feeling of authenticity, inclusion and belonging. Conversely, it also looks at ways that excluding one's multiple identities might be detrimental to both parties.

Recognizing that Hicks' (2003) description of respectful pluralism at work so closely aligns with IFYC's definition of religious pluralism, or the melting pot, feelings of inclusion and belonging are critical outputs for the IFYC model to take hold in the corporate arena.

Individuals need to feel a sense of belonging both as individuals and in the processes that guide their work. The notion of belonging is a key ingredient to participating in a productive work community and achieving common corporate goals (Filstad et al., 2019). A sense of belonging is associated with increased anticipation of benefits at work and also attributed to a decreased feeling of risk, leading to higher

Figure 3

A Typology of Resource Utilization As Predicted by Manager and Subordinate Strategies for Managing a Subordinate's Multiple Identities (Creary et al., p. 544)



productivity and inclusion (Piyawan et al., 2020).

I probed whether increasing inclusionary strategies of religion or interfaith engagement might create a greater sense of inclusion and belonging, which moves a corporate workplace from one of simple accommodation to one of unlocking the greatest assets of employees' multiple identities. I also explored what might cause corporate executives (managers) to pursue an exclusionary pathway as it relates to including religion or interfaith engagement in their IDEA strategy.

This study further explored whether accommodating or making space for religious beliefs and interfaith engagement in the workplace might lead to advantages for both the individual and the corporation. This information would be useful to IFYC as it forms its own strategy of engagement with corporate America. It also seeks to understand whether corporations might move beyond the concept of accommodation to test whether interfaith engagement could be a strategic asset as part of an overall IDEA strategy.

Research Questions

My research seeks to build from Creary et al.'s (2015) typology of resource utilization by exploring under what circumstance a specific inclusionary strategy of religious or interfaith engagement might be relevant for corporations in the United States. My research questions were guided by this primary question: Under what conditions might corporations engage in a program of interfaith engagement with their employee base using IFYC's theory of change? In pursuing this question, I more deeply explored the following to craft a series of recommendations for the organization:

1. In what ways does religious diversity currently express itself, if at all, in selected corporate cultures? How do corporations represent faith and religion in their diversity policies and programs, if at all?
2. Under what conditions might corporations consider engaging in a program of interfaith engagement with employees? What are corporate perceptions of the constraints they might feel/experience in doing so?
3. What skills do corporate leaders believe are necessary to engage religious or interfaith diversity in the workplace?
4. What outcomes might corporations find of value to encourage such participation? What opportunities might emerge from engaging religious diversity (i.e., innovation in product lines, workforce cohesion, market expansion)?
5. What are the obstacles or risks inherent in addressing religion or interfaith engagement in the workplace? Is the return-on-investment worthy of tackling those obstacles or risks?

To gauge specific program possibilities and to aid in the crafting of recommendations, a focused question was asked about possible programs that might be of use:

1. IFYC is beginning to take its 15 years of experience and expertise in higher education and bring it to the corporate sector. Which of these is most important to you:
 - a. Inspiration/Awareness-raising
 - b. Training and skill-building
 - c. Policies and procedures
 - d. Launching an Interfaith Employee Resource Group
2. For companies who are already working on this:
 - a. What concrete activities have you done that have been successful?
 - b. What impact have you seen?
 - c. What are you and your colleagues most concerned about?

Table 2 represents the ways in which the research questions align with my chosen conceptual framework. In all instances, data from these questions were collected using interviews of corporate representatives.

Table 2

Research Questions with Conceptual Framework's Resource Utilization Typology

Research Question	Resource Utilization Thread
In what ways does religious diversity currently express itself, if at all, in selected corporate cultures? How do corporations represent faith and religion in their diversity policies and programs, if at all?	<i>Inclusionary strategy</i> : seek to understand whether "deep-level diversity" of religion or interfaith engagement is included in corporate policies or culture.
Under what conditions might corporations consider engaging in a program of interfaith engagement with employees? 2. What are corporate perceptions of the constraints they might feel/experience in doing so?	<i>Inclusionary strategy</i> : seek to understand reasons corporations might enact the inclusionary strategy of religion as part of a multiple-identity system to unlock resources. <i>Exclusionary strategy</i> : seek to understand what constraints might cause a corporation to exclude religion or interfaith engagement from a deep-level diversity approach.
What skills do corporate leaders believe are necessary to engage religious or interfaith diversity in the workplace?	<i>Inclusionary strategy</i> : seek to understand what conditions corporate leaders feel need to be present to engage in using religion or interfaith engagement as an inclusionary strategy
What outcomes might corporations find of value to encourage such participation? What opportunities might emerge from engaging religious diversity (i.e., innovation in product lines, workforce cohesion, market expansion)?	<i>Decision on inclusionary or exclusionary strategy use</i> : seek to understand what resource exchange/creation a corporate leader may wish to see in planning on enacting an inclusionary or exclusionary strategy around religion or interfaith inclusion.
What are the obstacles or risks inherent in addressing religion or interfaith engagement in the workplace? Is the return-on-investment worthy of tackling those obstacles or risks?	<i>Exclusionary strategy</i> : seek to understand the conditions under which a corporate leader may elect to exclude religion or interfaith engagement due to perceived obstacles or risks.

Study Design & Methodology

This study utilized qualitative methods to obtain research, including an internal IFYC document review and interviews with IFYC program leaders, content analysis of corporate websites examining corporate policies and practices on religious diversity, and interviews with a sample of corporate leaders. Table three provides a summary of this distribution, and the research steps are placed in the order in which the study was conducted. Additional detail about each data collection tool will be discussed in greater depth below.

The following sections describe the data collection and analysis methods used in this study.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS: INTERVIEWS WITH IFYC LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL DOCUMENT REVIEW

Part of IFYC’s problem of practice in moving its model to the corporate sector is the need to understand how it might need to alter its higher education model appropriately to meet the needs of businesses. Central to my exploration of the problem of practice was to better understand the internal workings of IFYC, to engage with

Table 3

Research methods and data collection tools

Data Type	Data Collection Tool
Qualitative	Interviews of IFYC program staff and internal document review to understand the higher education program and possible models for corporate engagement.
Qualitative	Content analysis of all Fortune 100 company websites to understand the current landscape of religious inclusion within a broader inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility frame. This analysis drew deeply from the criteria outlined in the Tanenbaum Study (Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, 2016).
Qualitative	Interviews with representatives from Fortune 100 companies to distill the data gleaned from number 2 above and to better understand possibilities and concerns for IFYC. Questions mirrored the Diversity Manager Interview Protocol found in the Rand Corporation’s primer on managing diversity in corporate America. (Marquis, Lim, Scott, Harrell, & Kavanagh, 2008)

key programmatic and other leaders who would need to implement any program in the corporate sector, and to understand the ways in which IFYC leadership identified opportunities and barriers to success. For 20 years, IFYC has successfully expanded its reach by adding an increasing number of college and university campuses to its program roster, but the leap to the corporate sector, which had entirely different operating structures and different markers of success, required that I understand IFYC's culture, its internal appetite for change and what core attributes it might bring to this new sector.

I began by reviewing 10 internal documents provided by IFYC. A full list of the documents reviewed can be found in Appendix A. These documents included existing research compilations of interfaith engagement in the corporate sector, planning documents about the ways in which the organization's leaders were thinking about a pilot program for corporations, early program proposals submitted to several corporations, and, more broadly, internal planning documents that demonstrated a desire to expand the organization's mission and reach beyond the higher education space. I also reviewed broader strategic planning documents in which IFYC sought to move to a more encompassing name of Interfaith America, in which it outlined various pathways for expansion, including into the corporate sector, among others. The analysis of these documents provided a framework for organizational planning and a foundation for what IFYC "knows and doesn't know" about the corporate arena. This provided helpful context as I prepared for in-depth internal interviews.

IFYC identified 11 program and executive leaders who responded favorably to the request for participation in the study. This sample was based on the IFYC President's knowledge of the research topic, and each recommended interviewee's previous history in program development and/or potential future involvement in program development in the corporate space. Interviews with IFYC staff and internal document review were combined to better understand existing IFYC programs and the ways in which IFYC program staff and leadership envision a potential overhaul for adults in the corporate workforce. See Appendix B for a list of interview participants and role at IFYC.

The sample includes five one-on-one interviews with IFYC staff and two focus group sessions comprising three participants in each group. Each prospective participant received background on the proposed study design and an invitation for their voluntary participation in an interview to add context and information to later research steps. Through an internal IFYC sponsor, invited participants were asked to schedule a mutually agreeable time to conduct a recorded Zoom interview of approximately 45 minutes to one hour. The invitation yielded 11 interview participants, who

completed interviews during the months of May and June 2021. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted using Zoom. The protocol for the program and executive leadership interviews can be found in Appendix C.

The interview questions and answers were designed to understand the organizational context from which IFYC was considering entry into the corporate space and to glean key themes that matched the conceptual framework for later corporate interviews. The analysis of IFYC program and executive staff interviews was also used to make evidenced-based recommendations to IFYC leadership about the state of readiness of its key staff to exact significant operational change.

The process of analyzing the data from the interviews and focus group sessions included creating a transcript of each interview/focus group session from the recorded Zoom conversation using a live transcription service on Rev.com, which takes an audio file and returns a transcribed document in Microsoft Word. I reviewed the service's transcription to ensure accuracy and to make any appropriate edits when compared against the audio recording. This allowed each transcript to be used to glean relevant questions for those participating in the corporate interview process.

QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS: FORTUNE 100 WEBSITES

A content analysis of Fortune 100 company websites (n=100) was conducted to understand the current landscape of religious inclusion within a broader inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility frame. This analysis drew from the criterion outlined in the Tanenbaum study (Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, 2016). Its four main tenets include:

1. Non-Discrimination and Non-Harassment on the Basis of Religion or Belief;
2. Religious Accommodation and Inclusion;
3. Promoting Sustainable and Innovative Business through Protecting Freedom of Religion or Belief;
4. Protecting and Promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief in Our Communities.

Following a sample analysis of 10 of the Fortune 100 websites, my analysis focused on the first two of these tenets, as this was the information most readily available.

In addition, I looked for indicators that formal systems exist that support and encourage religious expression at work. This could take the form of affinity or employee resource groups and other specific practices that demonstrate a purposeful attempt to use religious expression as a strategic asset, such as listed trainings or skill

building programs in religious inclusion.

Using a list of Fortune 100 companies, I reviewed all 100 Fortune 100 websites using two major search engines through iterative searches with the following sample terms: religious diversity; diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility; employee groups by religion; religious accommodations; religious holidays, etc. A combination of computer-aided text searching (find, find-next functions) and structured responses were loaded into a data matrix to code each site to draw trends that will be used for the select corporate interviews. My analysis was cross-referenced against the 2021 Corporate Religious Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Index (<https://religious-freedomandbusiness.org/redi>), which ranks the Fortune 100 using a similar review of corporate websites. That cross-referencing exercise confirmed my data analysis, providing a solid benchmark from which to assess the current landscape of corporations in the Fortune 100 engaging in some form of religious or interfaith inclusion. Please see Appendix D for the content analysis chart.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS: CORPORATE INTERVIEWS

From the content analysis above, I selected 10 corporations from the REDI Index, seeking five who received high scores for religious inclusion practices and five who received low marks on the same scale. I sought direct email contacts for each corporation, narrowing in on the executive in charge of human resources or IDEA. I also used LinkedIn to seek connections in my network to try to reach appropriate high-level contacts from the list of 10 from which to send formal invitations to participate in the study. This produced a list of five contacts who agreed to participate, two who had scored in the top 50 of the REDI Index and three who scored in the lower half of the index. From there, snowball sampling produced three additional participants, all of which were in the lower half of the index. This was necessary given the sensitivity of the topic and the inherent risk that all interview participants shared with me concerning speaking candidly about religion in the workplace. Eight corporations (n=8) ultimately agreed to an interview to better understand the rationale for each corporation's chosen approaches to religious inclusion, if any.

Each prospective participant received a background on the proposed study design, which invited their voluntary participation in an interview. Invited participants were asked to schedule a mutually agreeable time to conduct an interview. The eight participants completed interviews during the months of November 2021 to January 2022. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted using Zoom. Appendix E provides the text of the emailed invitation to participate in the study. Depending on the answers to early questions, some tailored follow-up questions may

have occurred to better probe the overall concept of religious inclusion in the participating corporation.

Interview participants included six C-suite executives in the human resources or IDEA departments with the participating company and, in two instances, with leadership of religion-aligned ERGs to gain an employee-level perspective of the topic. This was important as my conceptual framework looked at both the perspective of leader/managers and those being led/managed to understand the ways in which religion or interfaith engagement could be used as an inclusionary or exclusionary strategy in multiple identity management.

The interviews probed the extent to which religion or interfaith engagement played a role in the corporation, its policies, culture or other activities and the rationale for inclusion or non-inclusion using the interview protocol listed in Appendix F. The interviews also asked what resources an organization like IFYC might provide in the future that may be of interest to the participating corporations, if any. I also explored the ways in which these decisions tied to any larger corporate values and if their rationale included religious inclusion as part of an overall strategic tool on managing multiple identities as aligned with my conceptual framework.

To gain as honest an assessment as possible, each participating corporation conducted an anonymous interview. For the purposes of providing a broad description that may be useful for the purposes of this study, I identified each participating corporation through their Standard Industrial Classification code, a system used by the U.S. government to classify industry areas. The following markers are used for the eight interviewed corporations:

1. SIC-3119 Miscellaneous Food Manufacturing
2. SIC-5331 Retail-Variety Stores
3. SIC-5812 Eating Places
4. SIC-6111 Real Estate Credit
5. SIC-6411 Insurance Agents, Brokers & Service
6. SIC-7311 Services-Advertising Agencies
7. SIC-7370 Services-Computer Programming, Data Processing
8. SIC-7372 Services-Pre-packaged Software

For context, the companies interviewed ranged from those with annual revenues of \$2.5 billion on low end to \$559 billion on the high end.

LIMITATIONS

My research has two limitations worth noting. First, given the sensitive nature of the topic, my sample size of eight corporate interviews (8% of the total possible sample pool) makes drawing broad conclusions difficult. It does provide an entry point for understanding the topic in some of the largest corporations in America, but recommendations from the data set must be considered in that context. The content analysis of Fortune 100 websites, backed up by the REDI index, provide important supplemental data for this project as it allows for a sense of the extent to which religion and interfaith engagement has penetrated the corporate landscape.

Second, while IFYC has expressed a deep interest in the larger corporations represented in the Fortune 100, it has also acknowledged that it is likely that working with smaller corporations may be necessary as it builds up its program. The research does not probe IFYC's theory of change outside of the Fortune 100, which by its very nature, may have significantly more resources available in which religion inclusion and interfaith engagement might be possible.

Data Analysis

I analyzed my data sequentially, starting first with the IFYC interview transcripts and document review, then creating a baseline of the corporate field from the Fortune 100 website content analysis and, ultimately, reviewing and coding the corporate interviews.

IFYC INTERVIEWS AND DOCUMENT REVIEW

I sought to understand whether IFYC's definition of religious pluralism might align with Creary et al.'s (2015) concept of harnessing multiple identities for greater resource output for both the employee and the employer. I also wanted to determine how IFYC thought the organization's higher education model might align with the corporate space.

Internal IFYC documents demonstrate that the organization has conducted extensive strategic planning to expand beyond the organization's central focus on the higher education space. A complete list of all documents review can be found in Appendix A. After 20 years of working almost exclusively with colleges and universities, IFYC spent much of 2021 in a strategic planning process seeking ways it might expand its theory of change beyond that sector.

Documents outline the work that the organization conducted among its staff and board, facilitated by The Raben Group, a national public policy and strategic communications group. The Raben Group helped IFYC explore the branding implications of conducting work beyond higher education, particularly in the fields of public health and the corporate arena. The firm's work focused on overall brand and structural identity, while my research sought to understand the opportunities and potential obstacles for IFYC entering the corporate space, specifically.

The Raben Group's work with IFYC through 2021 included a series of stakeholder interviews in philanthropy, media, higher education, religious leadership, and other thought leadership spaces to inform the organization on a question of a large institutional identity and purpose, including assessing opinions about IFYC's name, mission and vision. From that exploration and through a series of internal planning sessions, IFYC will change its organizational identity in mid-2022 to "Interfaith America," with the goal of encapsulating the desired expansion of its work and amplifying the organization's values and message.

I conducted five one-on-one interviews with IFYC staff and two focus group sessions comprised of three participants in each group. The interviews sought to answer the following questions:

1. Why do you believe a move into the corporate arena is important for IFYC's mission? How does such a move enable IFYC to expand its theory of change?
2. What elements of the existing higher education program design do you think will be applicable to the proposed corporate program engagement?
3. How will you measure success/impact of the proposed new program?
4. Which elements of the proposed program design do you believe will be beneficial to your corporate partners?
5. What does success look like in five years if you get this project off the ground?

The interview questions and answers were designed to understand the organizational context from which IFYC was considering entry into the corporate space and to glean key themes that matched the conceptual framework for later corporate interviews. The analysis of IFYC program and executive staff interviews was also used to make evidence-based recommendations to IFYC leadership about the state of readiness of its key staff to exact significant operational change.

I reviewed each interview transcript to seek repeating themes. My first stage of analysis highlighted quotes that helped me understand the ways in which program staff was thinking about the relationship between the core higher education program and a possible corporate program. I overlayed that thinking onto my conceptual framework to ascertain alignment. (See Table 4 for a summary of those findings.)

IFYC staff reported that while core overarching approaches from the organization's higher education program would be able to be adapted, more work would need to be done to understand the desired outcomes from corporate partners. While higher education has learning outcomes as a key organizational goal, IFYC staff who were interviewed recognized that corporations may not adopt a "learning for learning's sake" approach to any possible engagement. This was an important factor as I sought to create the interview protocol for corporate interviews, as I needed to ascertain what possible outcomes would matter to corporate participants.

Next I entered into an exercise of open coding, followed by axial coding and then sorting into final coding categories, specifically seeking greater clarity of the questions I needed to ask corporations in corporate interviews to determine synergies between IFYC's desires and possible needs and expectations of corporations. That process generated the open codes in Table 5.

IFYC Higher Education Program Components that may transfer to proposed Corporate Program

IFYC Higher Education Program Offering	Possible Corporate Application	Quote Examples	Conceptual Framework Questions to Explore
<p>Campus Consulting</p> <p><i>IFYC offers capacity building sessions and longer-term consultations designed to guide and support institutions seeking to strengthen interfaith leadership on college campuses with a goal of making interfaith cooperation a greater part of institutional priorities.</i></p>	<p>Corporate Consulting</p> <p><i>IFYC staff believe this higher education consulting model could be adapted for the corporate space.</i></p>	<p>"We're looking at the way that we have consulted with higher education intuitions and the ways that we have done both surveys and consulting and holding space for a group of faculty/staff, etc. (We are looking at) taking that and transferring or translating that to a corporate space. So, our proposed corporate consulting model is very much inspired and influenced by the work that we have already done in higher ed."</p>	<p>Can IFYC's campus consulting model assist corporations in creating inclusionary strategies that match corporate priorities by harnessing religion or interfaith engagement aspects in multiple identity management?</p>
<p>Training</p> <p><i>IFYC currently conducts an array of online and on-campus trainings for students, faculty, staff and administrators around engaging across interfaith difference.</i></p>	<p>Training and Team-building exercises</p> <p><i>IFYC staff believe this higher education consulting model could be adapted for the corporate space.</i></p>	<p>"There're so many trainings we go through in professional development ... but it doesn't really have an impact on the culture. It doesn't really have an impact long term on engagement on day-to-day life. And I would love if we found a way to develop a program that actually did have an impact (on corporate culture)."</p>	<p>Can IFYC create tailored trainings that allow for deeper engagement with religion or interfaith interactions that allow for ease in multiple identity management?</p>
<p>Campus Climate Framework Assessment</p> <p><i>IFYC deploys a campus climate framework to assess overall campus culture, practices and climate to help colleges and universities create a baseline and a plan for deeper engagement.</i></p>	<p>Organizational Climate Framework Assessment</p> <p><i>IFYC believes this climate framework might help corporations assess a more expansive view of diversity in the corporate setting</i></p>	<p>"The campus climate framework is very applicable. That was adapted from a racial and ethnic climate framework, but really it looks at something called historic legacy of an institution. Have they been inclusive or exclusive of particular groups? What are the remnants of that today? Another dimension of the climate is the behavioral climate, so the interactions that happen within that climate, the engagement piece, the compositional climate. What is the actual diversity in the space and perceptions of that diversity? Do people know that they work in an environment with a religiously diverse or homogenous set of colleagues? And then the last piece, which is critical, is called the psychological climate dimension. Do you perceive the space as welcoming? --- "When we take a snapshot of a campus environment, we ask similar questions about how students are engaging, but also how they perceive how welcoming the space is. Do they feel there are supports in place for them to express themselves and their worldviews, policies and accommodations? I think investigating how people feel in the space is a really important first step in the corporate work, as well."</p>	<p>Recognizing that managers make decisions about deploying inclusionary or exclusionary strategies based on possible resource exchanges, can IFYC's climate framework provide an expanded focus of ways in which engaging religion/interfaith diversity might unlock new and valuable resources for a corporation?</p>

Open Codes		
Category	Definition of Category	Qualitative Quote Examples
Treating Employees' Religious Diversity as a Resource	Ability to harness religious diversity as a positive attribute versus an obstacle to achieving goals (inclusionary strategy)	"We were hearing that employers are looking for employees who can navigate a diverse set of spaces, who can build relationships across difference. That's what this work, that's what this interfaith work does."
Identity-focused Engagement	Adding religious diversity as a key component of inclusion in diversity policy and practice (inclusionary strategy)	"As we get into corporate America, we're looking to foster a recognition that religion is a dynamic at play with people (who) might be your colleagues but also your customers, your clients, your partner organizations. Religion is a dynamic at play; it doesn't have to be something to be feared. It's something that can be engaged productively."
Accommodating the Whole Person	Belief that structures should allow for key identity attributes to be embraced without exclusion of religion (inclusionary strategy)	"We already operate in a structure where some people are allowed to bring their whole selves to work, more so than others. So, if you're a white Christian, you get to bring yourself, your whole self to work, without even realizing maybe that you're doing it much more readily than a Black Muslim or, fill in the blank. Similarly, I could think there are examples around gender and parenting. It would be interesting to dissect a little bit, what does it mean to bring your whole self to work? Are some people already doing that? And we just accept it as okay. And we don't think that certain other whole selves are okay, so those are the ones that get compartmentalized out." --- "I think (corporations) need to care about this because religion is not separate from a person's whole self. I think for a lot of people there's a dichotomy between 'culture is different from religion. Culture and ethnicity are different than religion'. And that's just not true for a lot of folks. It's definitely not true for folks who are Jews. It's not true for folks from minority ethnic communities, where religion is very much part and parcel of a person's ethnic and racial and cultural identity. It's not true of a lot of more conservative-leaning Black Christians. So, there's that dichotomy of 'religion can be left off the table, but we can engage other stuff in the DEI space' is just not an accurate way to think about a person's full self."
Workplace Culture	Understanding whether a person feels welcome in the corporation's workplace culture (inclusionary or exclusionary strategy)	"And then the last piece, which is critical, is called the psychological climate dimension. And that essentially is 'do you perceive the space as welcoming?' Do you feel discriminated against or excluded, or do you feel invited in? There are many different ways, there are many different things that can signal whether that aspect of the culture is welcoming or not welcoming."
Leadership Development	Leadership as a key moderator about whether or how to include religion as a key IDEA element (inclusionary or exclusionary strategy)	"So, you go in and you talk to the leadership at, well, there's a few different places where you could start these conversations inside a corporation, but you talk to somebody, maybe it's leadership, and maybe they want to just, first of all, get a temperature read on religious diversity and how folks feel about it at their organization." --- "IFYC is invested in preparing people to be leaders themselves in whatever way that looks like. We are interested in empowering folks to do the work in their own setting. We never want to just say, 'Well, we're the experts.' But actually, we show people the ways in which they themselves are leaders."

Open Codes		
Category	Definition of Category	Qualitative Quote Examples
Team Building	Engaging a group's multiple identities as a way to build team cohesion and strength/ unlock resources (inclusionary strategy)	"And then on that skills piece, the effectiveness of teams: there is this social capital that comes from bringing people from diverse walks of life together. I love thinking about it that way as a resource, but how do you leverage the resource? That becomes structured or what we would call formal interfaith engagement, so tools or roadmaps for engaging employees intentionally on questions that bring out those resources would be a big win."
Training and Skill Building	Recognizing that religious diversity is often not included, a recognition that formal training and skill building is critical to do so productively (inclusionary strategy))	"A deep and radical commitment to welcoming, preparing people to engage and having space that engages very deep religious differences. How do we make space for this person and this person?' And when you do that, you have to reckon with very deep differences." --- "Will there be appetite for ... really skill-building and supporting people in developing skills to engage across lines of religious difference productively, to leverage religious diversity as a strength, to leverage people's knowledge of religiously diverse communities to be able to work more effectively, including marketing to different religious communities that you might be working within?"
Educating about/ Mitigating against Risk	Given that there are valid risks and cultural taboos about including religion, recognition that education and formal risk mitigation is essential (inclusionary or exclusionary strategy)	"We as a country are historically very religious, but we have a lack of comfort with discussing religion in general, that we just don't have a cultural competency with dealing with that identity. And not to say that we do have cultural competency in dealing with race effectively or with sexual orientation or gender identity, but there have been movements that have elevated that in just different ways or that the starkness of inequities around those forms of identity are now increasingly difficult for us to shy away from. And, so, they become more present in our national conversation." --- I think because it potentially feels so risky, I think one of the things that would be interesting for IFYC to think about with organizations is 'what are the baby steps into it?' And how do you do it in a way that doesn't bump up against legal liability? I think that's what they're mostly going to worry about is 'Ah, this is just a pit of possible liability.' We've been able to demonstrate or with in partnership with some corporations that are brave, we've been able to demonstrate how to do it. There's a model out there for, or a few different models for how to, to wrap religious diversity into your regular DEI models."
Inclusion as a Business Strategy	Acknowledgement that as workforces become more global, religious inclusion may play a role in overall business outcomes (inclusionary strategy)	"We see corporate America saying, 'religious diversity and the ability to engage religious diversity is critical to success, to business success, to societal success, we care about our people'. Again, whether our people are our employees or our customers or our constituents, and whatever our business or our context is, there's a new recognition that religious diversity is an element to be paid attention to. I think that's especially rising to the top now as our economy is readjusting to post-COVID, and employees and companies are wrestling with what keeps me here? What are the values? Do I feel valued here?" --- "I'm doing trainings and people are coming, calling in from all over the world. And we're actively thinking about things like why particular women in Saudi Arabia might not be able to be on camera because of some of the strictures of their religious persuasions, right? Just like your employees need to be able to understand each other across all sorts of other intercultural dimensions, they need to be able to have at least a baseline awareness of how to interact with folks from different faith backgrounds, because it will actually implicate some day-to-day pieces of their work."

The open codes emerged after reviewing the interview data against Creary et al.'s (2015) typology of resource utilization. Specifically, I sought alignment with inclusionary or exclusionary strategies the IFYC program might take in pursuing a case for inclusion in the corporate sector. IFYC staff articulated ways in which embracing religious or interfaith diversity might be seen as a resource generator while also acknowledging that corporations may seek specific exclusionary strategies to downplay the risk that exists from engaging across religious difference (Cash & Gray, 2000; Piyawan et al., 2020). They also articulated that religious diversity engagement, if handled correctly, could be a key strategic tool for corporations in an increasingly global, competitive marketplace (Downey et al., 2015).

From these open codes, themes were drawn from the groups of quotes to create the axial codes of “feeling safety”, “empathy”, “corporate cohesion”, “religious literacy”, and “broad stakeholder engagement”. Table 6 illustrates the three final selective codes of “Belonging”, “Competitive Advantage”, and “Religious Pluralism” and how the axial codes fed into each of the final categories.

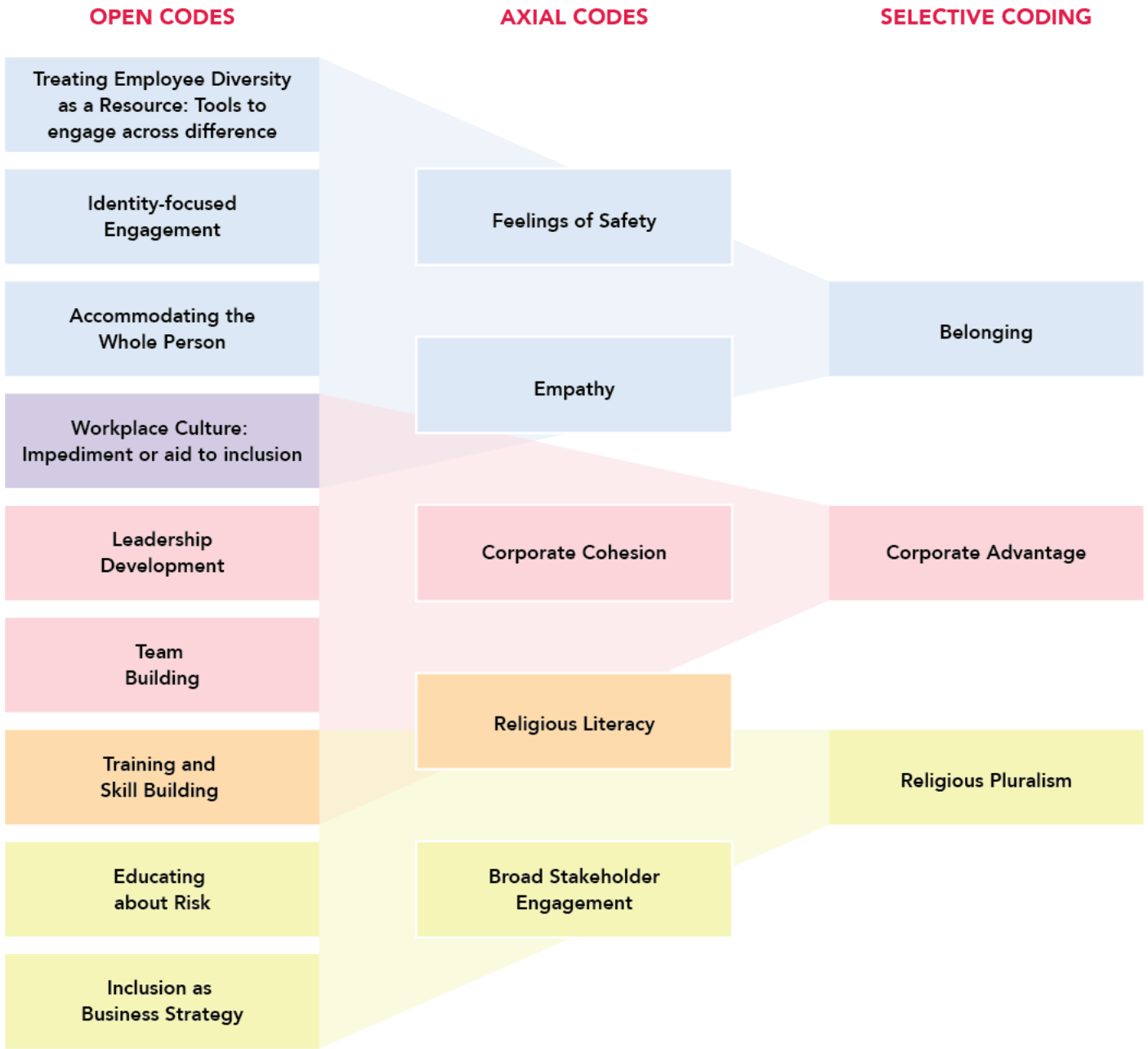
The axial codes of “feeling safety” and “empathy” followed the assertion that individuals need to feel a sense of comfort and understanding before they can move from a place of deep-level diversity to unlock the creativity many corporations desire in today’s workplace (Friedman et al., 2016; Gebert et al, 2014). A sense of safety and a culture of empathy can lead to a true sense of belonging (McClure & Brown, 2008), which can create an environment poised for better performance and the pursuit of common work goals (Filstad et al., 2019).

The axial codes pointed to a group of inclusionary strategies – creating an environment where all employees felt they could bring their full talents to bear in a supportive environment, building cohesion through investing in training and skill development – while also acknowledging the desire to deploy exclusionary strategies to downplay risk. IFYC staff recommended that instead of deploying a resource suppression strategy (Creary et al., 2015), education and creating what they called “religious literacy” would allow corporations to have a competitive advantage by utilizing the full resource output that comes from engaging an employee’s multiple identities. They further indicated that it would aid in achieving IFYC’s goal of a nation steeped in religious pluralism, specifically following Hicks’ (2003) concept of a “respectful pluralism at work”

FORTUNE 100 WEBSITE CONTENT ANALYSIS

The content analysis of the Fortune 100 websites was intended to give me a baseline sense of how many corporations in the pool of 100 corporations had engaged

Table 6
Qualitative Coding Scheme of IFYC Interviews



with religion or interfaith diversity in its policies, practices or strategies. I wanted to gauge whether there was an existing market for IFYC’s potential program and whether the review of the existing corporate landscape might help provide more targeted recommendations for program type.

For example, if most corporations had well-defined policies and procedures for religious inclusion or interfaith engagement, this may not be a fruitful place for

IFYC to contribute. If, conversely, few had defined employee resource groups or approaches to accommodation around issues of religion or interfaith engagement, there may be a more direct pathway for the organization to contribute. My analysis was cross-referenced against the 2021 Corporate Religious Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Index (<https://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/redi>), which ranks the Fortune 100 using a similar review of corporate websites.

My content analysis of the main diversity and inclusion landing pages of Fortune 100 companies shows that religion receives less attention than all the other major identity categories: race/ethnicity, women/gender, sexual orientation, veterans/military, disability, age, and family. Cross referencing against the REDI Index confirmed my data analysis, providing a solid benchmark from which to assess the current landscape of corporations in the Fortune 100 engaging in some form of religious or interfaith inclusion. The results of my content analysis can be found in Appendix D; the footnotes list my criteria.

This analysis showed that while all corporations acknowledge that Title VII prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, religion is under-addressed compared to the other identity categories in the EEOC laws. The REDI index confirms this analysis. The Religious Freedom and Business Foundation, the sponsors of the REDI Index, assess a corporation's involvement in religious inclusion by tabulating inclusion of religion on IDEA landing pages, the inclusion of religion (including atheist/agnostic beliefs) in corporate ERGs and any mention of public trainings around religious inclusion provided by the company (<https://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/redi>).

In their report, they note that while race, gender and other categories are mentioned 3,166 times on Fortune 100 landing pages for diversity, religious inclusion is only mentioned 92 times. Likewise, while race, gender and other categories are reflected in 737 different Fortune 100 ERG configurations, religious inclusion is only an organizing principle for 38. Between 2020 and 2021, however, the report notes a movement toward greater inclusion of religion in the Fortune 100 companies, as the number earning a score on the index increased from 53 in 2020 to 59 in 2021.

This benchmarking informed the development of my questions for corporate interviews, as it gave me a window into the overall Fortune 100's current response to religious or interfaith inclusion. Two of my eight corporate interviewees ranked high in the REDI Index while six did not register marks for significant religious inclusion practices. This allowed me to probe the reasons that some pursued inclusionary strategies while others either pursued exclusionary strategies or had yet to consider a pathway concerning religious inclusion.

The IFYC data and the Fortune 100 analysis provided the foundation for the corporate interviews. Using this data, I sought to probe the two primary areas of inquiry in my literature review, issues of accommodation and the use of religious inclusion as an element of corporate strategy. I also explored the key considerations that are frequently outlined for corporations who have chosen not to engage in this space, namely issues of legal risk, proselytizing and larger themes of church-state separation. That data would be used to overlay findings on Creary et al.'s (2015) typology of resource utilization in managing multiple identities.

CORPORATE INTERVIEWS

I reviewed each transcript to seek repeating themes from the eight corporate interviews. My first stage of coding highlighted quotes related to expressions of inclusionary or exclusionary practices within each corporation, pulling from Creary et al.'s (2015) conceptual framework on managing multiple identities. I entered into an exercise of open coding (see Table 7), followed by axial coding and then sorting into final coding categories.

I overlaid Creary et al.'s (2015) conceptual framework with groupings based on the intersection of religion and organizational management (Claire et al., 2005). This effort produced broad groupings about the ways corporations considered religious inclusion in training and awareness programs, the ways in which companies thought about engaging across difference (Sekerka & Yacobian, 2018), concepts of allyship, and ways that religious inclusion might help or harm workplace culture. Concurrently, the interview data produced significant conversations about the ways in which religious inclusion may be a value add or impediment to manager and subordinate relationships (Creary et al., 2015; Page, 2007; Cox & Blake, 1991) and the ways in which corporate leaders thought about inclusion of religion in any overall diversity programs (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Lastly, it demonstrated the significant concern about the risk of religious inclusion that many still felt (Cash & Gray, 2000; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2009; Piyawan et al., 2020;), specifically as it related to issues of possible proselytization.

These initial categories were too large to draw major conclusions, so I sought to group them into the broader frames from the literature review of accommodations (Gelb & Longacre, 2012; Sekerka & Yacobian, 2018), opportunities to harness employees' multiple identities (including religious affiliation) as part of corporate strategy (Downey et al., 2015), and the broad category of risks (Piyawan et al., 2020). This framing produced axial codes of a desire to create a broader sense of inclusion overall within corporate culture and increased empathy for all employees through

Open Codes		
Category	Definition of Category	Qualitative Quote Examples
Training and Awareness on Diversity Issues	Training and awareness around religion and interfaith engagement as a key tool to be effective in engaging across difference (inclusionary strategy)	<p>"More around awareness training, how to engage with our religious diversity, because that's what a lot of people don't know. They just go in thinking 'prose-lytize, religion, scary'. So, to frame it in a different way is critical."</p> <p>"Executives need a different type, a smaller setting, maybe an executive workshop on how to lead in these spaces. For the employee base: what's allyship look like in this space? What does cooperation look like in this space, and why is it important? And to address things like antisemitism and Islamophobia and all this religious hate we're seeing. There's not all this readily available training and allyship and awareness. Stuff like that is lacking and is a space where IFYC has expertise."</p> <p>"It's compliance, then there's education and understanding. You could argue, they go hand in hand because you can't really do the compliance unless you understand it. But you get to beyond your basic hierarchy of needs, which is survival, which is compliance in the corporate world. And then you get to value add, right. Which is programmatic design and engagement, which is driving the outcome of belonging."</p>
Employee Engagement Across Difference	Making employees part of the process of using difference as an inclusionary versus exclusionary strategy (inclusionary strategy)	"Employees want to feel fully engaged and valued. It is really important for the next generation of employees. Our company culture is evolving as society is evolving."
Allyship as Key to Inclusion	Belief that other employees or managers are inclined to support religious differences even if religious tradition is not shared (inclusionary strategy)	"Because see, interfaith and inter-belief practices drive allyship and belonging because you're reaching out to people that have different beliefs than you to build community. But I've seen siloed approaches and I've benchmarked with other companies and have seen the same thing play out."
Accommodation of Religion	Actions taken to provide accommodation across religious difference/practice (inclusionary and exclusionary strategies)	<p><i>Exclusionary:</i> "I don't know that this is the first place that companies are going to start on their DEI journey. We really need to fix what's broken there first, before we get to religion. No one's expecting it right now. So why are we going to start there?"</p> <p><i>Inclusionary:</i> "The biggest successes, the biggest thing is people are talking about religion in the workspace now. People are not alone. I've heard so many, we have different events, we did different Muslim experiences at work and Islamophobia, Jewish experiences at work. After each of these different calls and conversations, I have people reaching out to me saying, this is the first time, we see all this stuff about being seen, valued, heard constantly. This is the first time I've ever felt seen. This is the first time I've ever heard. That type of stuff is just like, okay, this does matter. If there's a new employee who just started and all of a sudden sees this event and they're just like, wait, what? Okay, I really do belong here. That sense of belonging people are feeling because we're finally talking about these things openly."</p>

Open Codes		
Category	Definition of Category	Qualitative Quote Examples
Risks/Fears of Religious Inclusion	Examples of ways in which corporate representatives feel religious inclusion or interfaith dialogue should not be included (exclusionary strategy)	<p>“Why don’t you track religion?” In some communities, though, measuring anything can be a negative. It can be made to feel like, are you trying to keep up with me? Are you monitoring me? That is a very sensitive space that we have not gone into. It’s a diaspora. It is the communities themselves, from a Christianity standpoint, from an Islam standpoint, from a Hinduism standpoint, it’s not a monolith.”</p> <p>“It is a Pandora’s box.”</p> <p>“Biggest thing we would be worried about is discrimination and specifically being accused of discriminating. Religion makes that possibility more prevalent. For example, we tried a National Day of Prayer, joining in a broader movement, and employees weren’t interested. We didn’t want to push that. We even tried a time of ‘mindfulness,’ thinking we might get something there, and even that was vetoed. We are deeply worried about the notion of ‘separation of church and state.’”</p>
Manager-Subordinate Relationship across Difference	Leadership-staff dynamics that demonstrate how corporations engage across religious difference (inclusionary and exclusionary strategies)	<p>“That education piece is important, because as a manager, if I knew how to have that conversation, my employee would be a lot happier with my support for them.”</p> <p>“Are you creating an inclusive culture with your teams, or do employee hate working for you? It matters because when your employees feel they belong somewhere, they’ll stay, they’ll do better work. They’re not sitting there trying to put all this energy into hiding parts of themselves. Those questions aren’t even asked anymore because people know this part of me matters, and I can be myself here.”</p>
Harnessing Diversity as a Corporate Strategy Driver	Looking at ways that IDEA and, specifically, religion or interfaith engagement are used as part of an overall corporate strategy (inclusionary strategy)	<p>“It’s really finding that balance. On one side, I’m educating leaders saying, ‘Hey, this is important to this community,’ while also to the community saying, ‘Hey, is there a strategic way that we can position this that would show value?’. I think there’s been an evolution. Ten years ago, it was all about the business case. What’s the business case for diversity, and why is this important? And now it’s ‘We don’t care about a business case. You should know. Let’s have change right now.’”</p> <p>“DEI is moving beyond a ‘nice to do;’ it’s a business imperative. People expect stronger dignity and respect. We have been focusing on DEI efforts for 10 years now, and we are asking questions about what mark we have made from this effort.”</p>
Workplace Culture as Impediment or Aide to Inclusion	UWays in which overall culture encourage or discourage religious or interfaith inclusion (inclusionary and exclusionary strategies)	<p>“I need to understand that. Where is that group coming from? That’s where I would see an outcome. How does it improve your culture over time because you’re just one that’s more accepting, willing to listen first and seek to understand?”</p> <p>“The number one conversation going on is this great resignation, great reassessment. What is it going to take to attract the best of the best? If you don’t allow people to self-actualize at work, if you don’t allow them to build a community of belonging, as long as it’s not against something else, which every company will have a version of that in their values, then you run the risk of alienation.”</p>
Fear of Proselytizing of Religion	Any statements made or questions asked that demonstrate a specific fear that people of a faith tradition might seek to convert or proselytize toward another (exclusionary strategy)	<p>“That’s the force shield that gets thrown up. It’s a risk around proselytization, and because we don’t know how to control this, we’re not going to invite that.”</p> <p>“No proselytizing is part of our charter. That’s just not something we do here in a corporate setting. I think having those clear guidelines help and when anybody does anything against those guidelines, it’s really easy to say, ‘you need to remove that please’.”</p> <p>“We created this amazing relationship, and it wasn’t based on judgment. It wasn’t based on proselytizing. It wasn’t based on any of those things. It was just based on, ‘I need to know something different’.”</p>

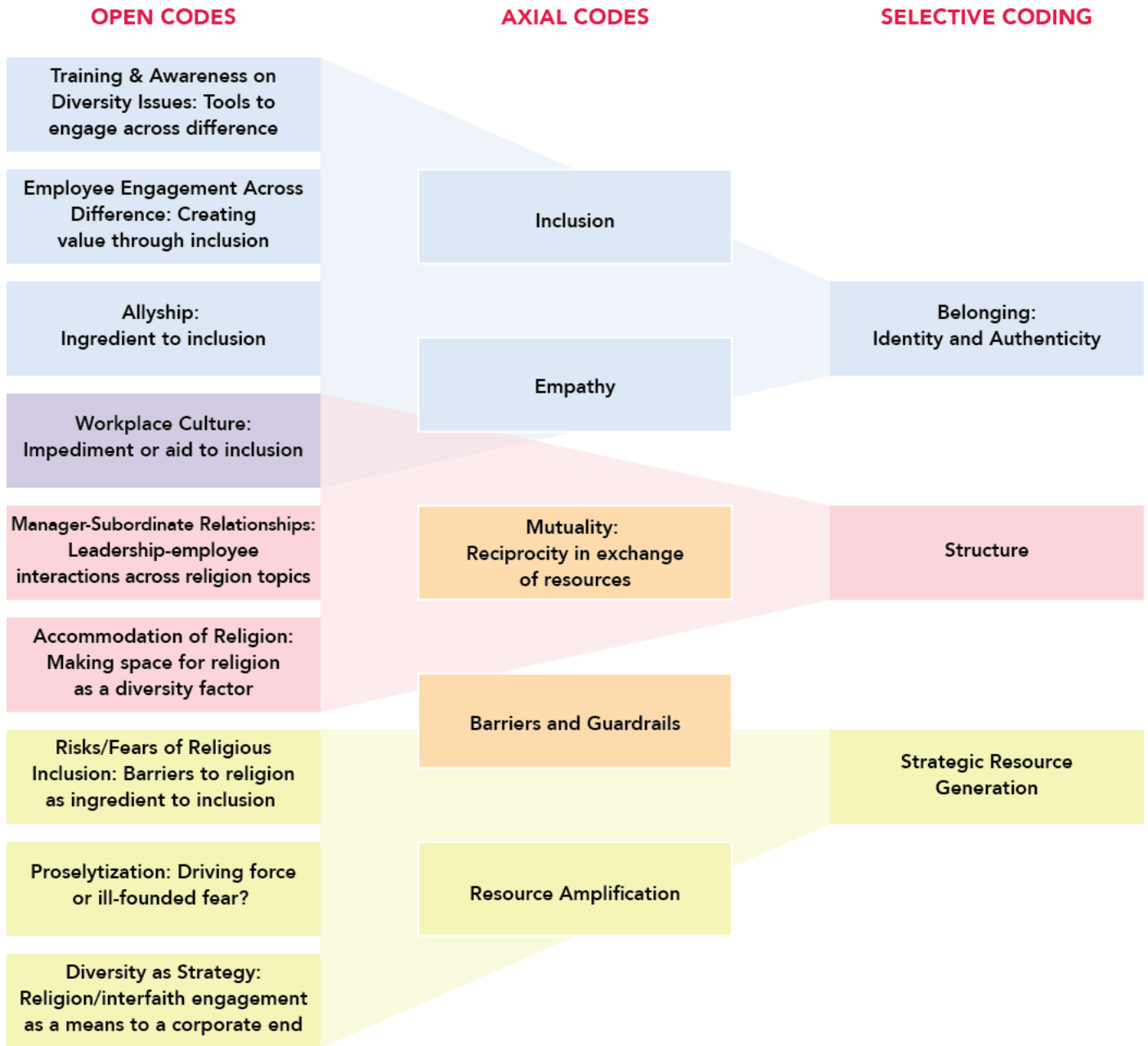
corporate practices. It also pointed to the broader category of mutuality (reciprocity in the exchange of resources between employee and employer). This ties directly to Creary et al.'s (2015) typology in that when employees and employer pursue inclusionary strategies, it leads to a mutually satisfying output of resource production.

There were significant themes of “barriers and guardrails,” capturing the ways in which corporate leaders were thinking about strategies that might allow for religious inclusion while also protecting employees who may find such inclusion threatening (Cash & Gray, 2000). Those who were already harnessing religious inclusion as a part of their IDEA programs and those contemplating such a move discussed religious inclusion in terms of resource exploitation (Creary et al., 2015), namely mapping out ways that religious inclusion might help corporations enhance the creativity and innovation of their workforce (Cox & Blake, 1991) while increasing access to diverse markets (Downey et al., 2015).

These axial codes of inclusion and empathy led to the broader theme of belonging, which had two related perspectives. For employees, there was a desire to find a way to allow their religious identity to be present in the workplace (Filstad et al., 2019), while for employers, there was a desire to do so in a way that unlocked higher productivity and a broader sense of inclusion within corporate culture (Downey et al., 2015). Those interviewed talked about a desire to reduce any feeling of risk that employees might feel – both from religious inclusion and also for those for whom religious inclusion may be uncomfortable – while unlocking the resources of an employee's multiple identities that led to greater productivity, creativity and innovation (Piyawan et al., 2020).

The axial codes of mutuality, and barriers and guardrails led to the broader theme of creating a structure that both allowed for the resource exchange between manager and subordinate that Creary et al. (2015) espouse in their typology by engaging religious identity as part of employees' multiple identities (Ely & Thomas, 2001). But it also recognized that part of that mutuality must also include a structure that makes the workplace an equal playing field for those who may not wish to engage in religious engagement (Cash & Gray, 2000). This blending of inclusionary and exclusionary strategies found a home for many corporate interviewees in sequestering the engagement in ERGs or providing a structure through an overall charter that spells out the ways in which religious inclusion might be incorporated while also protecting against proselytization and other risks (Gelb & Longacre, 2012; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2009). Interviewees questioned the best ways to create a culture in which religious inclusion might be more openly discussed and engaged to reduce feelings of anxiety for both those who wanted to engage the topic of religion

Table 8
Qualitative Coding Scheme of Corporate Interviews

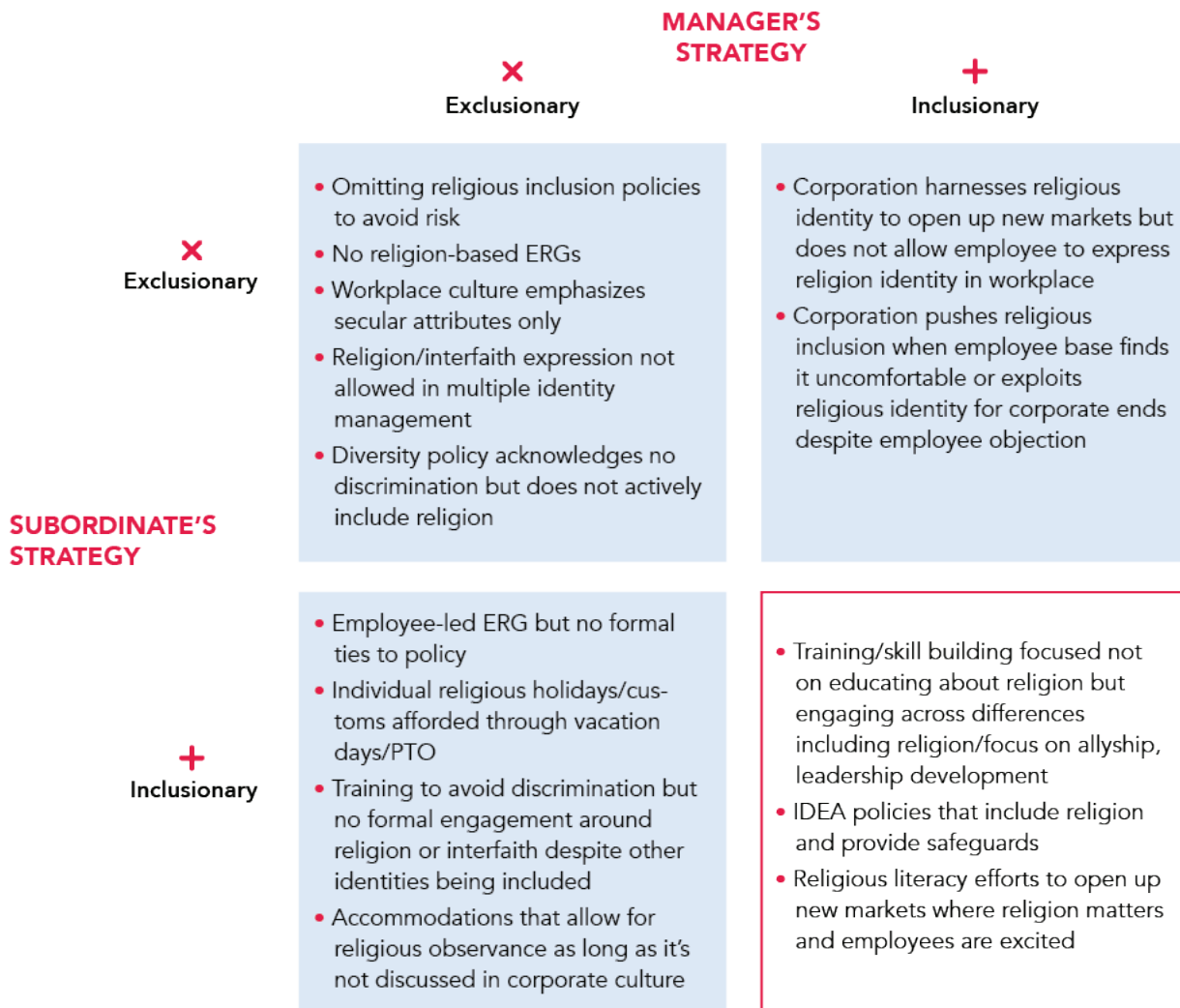


and those who did not. Creating this “safe space” or overall organizational learning (Sekerka & Yacobian, 2018) will be important if IFYC is to obtain a foothold in the corporate arena.

Finally, the exploration of barriers and guardrails met the concept of resource amplification through the theme of strategic resource generation, which is the output within the corporation when all employees feel valued and are “pulling in the same

Figure 4

Examples from interviews/coding exercises that amplify resource production.



direction” (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Dutton et al. (2010) note that one of the key resources that harnessing multiple identities can produce is the relationships with others that can be called on for support, greater teamwork and to reduce overall feelings of risk. Corporations interviewed that had already engaged religious inclusion through ERGs or other trainings noted that one output of such inclusion was greater team cohesion and breaking down stereotypes that could be used as impediments for closer working relationships. This mirrors the Ely and Thomas’s (2001) research that when cultural diversity is effectively harnessed, work groups function more effectively.

The results of this exercise can be found in Table 8.

Finally, I overlaid the salient examples from the first two coding sessions onto my conceptual framework (see Figure 4). Creary et al. (2015) note that while there is a resource exchange when a manager (the corporation/employer) and an employee both use exclusionary strategies, what they call a “status quo” state, the greatest positive output for both employer and employee is when both are using inclusionary strategies. Not only does this quadrant generate an overall positive work culture, Creary et al. (2015) point out that it unlocks innovative resources that most corporations find scarce in today’s marketplace. Should IFYC be able to partner with corporations to create greater “resource production,” my research indicates they will find a strong value proposition to advance their own theory of change.

Findings

My research demonstrates several areas of possible intersection between IFYC competencies and the question of religious inclusion for the Fortune 100, generally, and the sample set of eight corporations, specifically. Table 9 outlines the findings from each research question and corresponding recommendations from those findings.

The qualitative analysis showed an organization – IFYC – eager to engage with corporate America on a practice of interfaith engagement that it has successfully implemented on college campuses but also demonstrated a sector at varying degrees of willingness or readiness to receive that engagement. While IFYC’s own internal preparation to move beyond the higher education landscape was evident in the document review and throughout the interview conversations, the analysis of the Fortune 100’s diversity approaches show that religion or interfaith engagement receives far less attention than all other major identity categories often included in IDEA policies and practices. Of the eight interviews with C-suite executives and other employees in the sample of Fortune 100 companies, three had invested significantly in any program or practice of religious or interfaith inclusion. While eight out of 100 is a small sample, combined with analysis of all Fortune 100 corporate websites, there are some useful clues of the current state of religious inclusion/interfaith engagement in the corporate sector.

One DEI Officer noted a theme that ran through some aspect of all the corporate interviews, saying, “For years, religion was always seen like a Pandora’s box. And a lot of this has to do with the geopolitical climate that we live in. You name any sect or faith, there’s something stereotypical about that faith or something that can be polarizing that undermines most of the principles of the faith, which are love and inclusion.”

And while this research study demonstrated a majority who had not engaged in interfaith engagement, the findings do indicate a pathway for IFYC and an acknowledgement by all those interviewed that religious inclusion is an emerging aspect of “deep-level diversity” (Gebert et al., 2014) that is becoming a regular conversation within their corporations.

The following represents findings based on each research question.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

In what ways does religious diversity express itself, if at all, in selected corporate culture currently? How do corporations represent faith and religion in their diversity policies and programs?



FINDING 1

Unlike other areas of IDEA, corporations in the sample set engage religion or interfaith diversity far less and most do not have a clear strategy on how to tackle the issue as part of a broader diversity agenda. While all interviewed organizations acknowledge the EEOC mandate to protect against religious discrimination, only three engaged in a robust program of religious inclusion and interfaith engagement. This was primarily through the vehicle of an ERG.

All respondents began answering this question by referring back to the EEOC mandate to protect against religious discrimination in the workplace. Three of the eight interviewed corporations had included religious and interfaith engagement as a primary strategy to look at religious inclusion as an aspect of deep-level diversity. Each of the three used this vehicle to include religion as an aspect of multiple-identity engagement, with all three indicating that employees had come forward asking for this aspect of inclusion.

“Religion and politics tend to be the two topics which you don’t ever want to talk about because they can be divisive. And while we have typical (ERGs) like the African American group, the Latinx group, the Asian group, we also recognize there are other groups that collectively define identity, which is why we decided to create an interfaith group.”

The other five had not begun a formal level of employee engagement around religious or interfaith diversity but had looked at the issue through the lens of accommodation.



FINDING 2

Issues of religious accommodation are present in 7/8 of those interviewed. These most commonly express themselves through making observances of religious holidays easier, acknowledging sensitivity around

food choices in corporate facilities, etc. 62.5 percent of those interviewed, however, do not actively bring interfaith or religious discussions into their overall corporate environment.

“We’ve worked to do things like ensuring we have foods in our cafeteria that are compliant with certain religious practices, working to set aside prayer rooms for people who have to pray during the day or desire to pray during the day, and then even working to educate people on some of the hate that certain religious groups may experience like Islamophobia or antisemitism.”

All but one corporation interviewed acknowledged the development of a program of deep accommodation around religious identity. These accommodations included ensuring there were food choices that reflected specific religious practices and setting aside spaces for specific religious observations. Three out of the eight noted some basic training around issues of religious identity, starting from a perspective of where religious bias might be present. When it comes to including religious engagement in corporate culture, however, more than 60 percent indicated that unlike other identity groups, religious inclusion has yet to find a foothold in overall company culture.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

Under what conditions might corporations consider engaging in a program of interfaith engagement with employees? What are corporate perceptions of the constraints they might feel/experience in doing so?



FINDING 3

Corporations would engage religion or interfaith diversity for two primary reasons: 1) to allow for deeper employee satisfaction and engagement in the workplace, and 2) if it proved to advance overall corporate strategy objectives.

The corporations in the respondent group noted that religious inclusion is coming up more frequently from their employee bases. As other identity groups are acknowledged through either ERGs or included in other aspect of cultural sensitivity trainings, corporate leaders noted that the “great resignation,” the phrase used in

popular culture for the 33 million Americans that have quit their jobs during the past two years, corporate leaders said they feel the need to pay greater attention to the issues that make up employee engagement issues.

“DEI is moving beyond a ‘nice to do.’ It’s a business imperative. People expect stronger dignity and respect (for their multiple identities).”

All respondents noted that there may be corporate strategy reasons to look at ways to effectively engage across religious difference, citing the ways in which customer bases want to know they are valued, as well, for their religious diversity. Beyond thinking through retention strategies for employees, six of the companies cited specific marketing segmentation strategies around issues of religious identity.

“There is a strategic way we can position this that would show value. It’s retention, it’s engagement ...it’s our customers, and now we have a younger generation that doesn’t feel the need to hide parts of themselves.”



FINDING 4

There is deep concern among 5/8 of those interviewed about how to engage religious diversity while preventing proselytization, avoiding legal risks, or allowing for religious dogma to negatively impact the corporate brand.

While respondents acknowledged that religious diversity is becoming a more common theme, there is still a significant fear of the negative consequences of engaging across religious lines. That fear spanned both internal corporate culture considerations, such as divisions between specific religious groups, from those who claim no faith tradition and feel it has no place at work or cause rifts among teams.

“Our legal team, our office support, all these people were like ‘how can we ensure it’s not going to become a Christian club, or it’s not going to be one faith over another and not going to become divisive?’ Because religion alone is inherently exclusive.”

Of those considering religious or interfaith engagement, there was as much a concern that engaging religion could lead to claims of discrimination in both directions: from those who believed their faith tradition was not being taken seriously enough to those who thought religious inclusion infringed on their right to not encounter issues of religion at the workplace.

“The biggest thing we would be worried about is discrimination and specifically being accused of/responsible for discriminating. Religion makes that possibility more prevalent.”

Of the three corporations that have included religious or interfaith engagement in their employee engagement programs or corporate culture, all three noted the need for defined boundaries and safeguards to protect the rights of all in their workforce. The three who had included religion or interfaith engagement in their employee engagement strategy noted that this is a relatively new part of the IDEA field and felt the specific skills they needed to do this work was seriously lacking compared to engagement around other identity categories.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

What skills do corporate leaders believe are necessary to engage religious or interfaith diversity in the workplace?



FINDING 5

Corporations in the interview sample cited a lack of leadership training on the ways to engage religion and interfaith engagement both at the C-suite level and the middle management level as skills missing from advancing this work.

Given these concerns, I probed more deeply about what specific skills corporate executives believed were necessary to engage across religious identity. Many indicated that the only thing most diversity or human resource executives are taught about religious diversity is through the lens of reducing risk or ensuring compliance with federal non-discrimination laws. Of the respondents, seven out of the eight indicated a need for greater knowledge about how religious diversity factors into the lives of their employees beyond issues of accommodation and that having that knowledge and training would allow for meaningful engagement.

“These are all entry points to build a stronger community, your identity and aspects of your identity should be leveraged a positive, not a negative. I know that the narrative is often the negative, because identity is used to divide, but identity can be used to unite if it’s done in the right way. In fact, it can actually make it much stronger and address some of the liabilities, which is the alienation and othering that takes place.”

Each respondent noted that the desired outcome for such engagement would be a sense of overall belonging for their workforce, equal to but not separate from other areas of IDEA engagement.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

What outcomes might corporations find of value to encourage such participation? What opportunities might emerge from engaging religious diversity (i.e., innovation in product lines, workforce cohesion, market expansion)?



FINDING 6

Corporations in the sample set acknowledged that successful engagement across deep-level diversity difference, including interfaith diversity, would be a value add to overall strategy, team building and culture, recruiting and retention efforts and that they might engage in this space if they could reduce the risk.

Issues of employee engagement were a recurring theme for the respondents, and all eight indicated that issues of religious engagement – or conversely the fear of religious engagement – were a part of regular conversations or considerations in the IDEA space in their companies. When probed about what outcomes might be seen as worth engaging religion or interfaith engagement, the top responses were 1) to more effectively and complete engage their employee bases, 2) to reduce possible tensions that have started to emerge from an increasingly multicultural (including religious identity) workforce, 3) to increase retention by findings ways to embrace an employee’s “whole self,” and 4) to better understand and engage with market segments for whom religious identity is important.

“Employees want to feel fully engaged and valued. It is really important to the next generation of employees. Our company culture is evolving as society is evolving.”

RESEARCH QUESTION 5

What are the obstacles or risks inherent in addressing religion or interfaith engagement in the workplace? Is the return-on-investment worthy of tackling those obstacles or risks?



FINDING 7

Corporations in the sample set cited the lack of a “playbook” to engage in religious or interfaith diversity. Of those not currently attempting such engagement, fears of legal risk and harming existing corporate culture were cited. Of those who have engaged, many cited early setbacks because of the lack of deep knowledge on how best to begin such an engagement.

“For those companies who have yet to engage the topic of either religion or interfaith dialogue in the company’s culture, that’s the force shield that gets thrown up: ‘there’s a risk and it’s a risk around proselytization.’ Because we don’t know how to control this, we’re not going to invite that.”

Respondents were at different places in looking at issues of religious or interfaith engagement as part of an overall approach to IDEA. The universal theme among all eight was the acknowledgement that there is a lack of training for such engagement. For the three that have included engagement across religion or interfaith dialogue, they noted early missteps from not having “best practices” readily available. Each of the three shared stories about needed to create guardrails for such engagement and while they had found effective tools, they did so through a process of “trial and error.” Through the interviews, the remaining five raised questions about how to mitigate against the aforementioned risks even if they might see some benefit to do doing so.

“We lose the diversity of thought that comes with people with different religious backgrounds. If we don’t have diverse religious backgrounds, I don’t know why we’re solving for dietary requirements when it comes to the High Holidays or when it comes to Islam or when it comes to Hinduism. We have to ask, ‘what do we gain? what do we lose?’ (when considering engagement around religion).”

Even the three who had begun a program of religious inclusion noted trying to figure out how to harness the positive potential outcomes. Those three noted wanting to unlock the diverse perspectives of different faith traditions alongside other aspects of identity management but felt that many C-suite executives felt they had “checked the box” when solving for issues of accommodation. One executive said asking the bigger question or what’s gained or lost has to be a part of the broader conversation about adding religious diversity to other aspects of IDEA.

RESEARCH QUESTION 6

To gauge specific program possibilities and to aid in the crafting of recommendations, a focused question was asked about possible programs that might be of use:

IFYC is beginning to take its 15 years of experience and expertise in higher ed and bring it to the corporate sector. Which of these is most important to you:

1. Inspiration/Awareness-raising
2. Training and skill-building
3. Policies and procedures
4. Launching an Interfaith Employee Resource Group

For companies who are already working on this:

1. What concrete activities have you done that have been successful?
2. What impact have you seen?
3. What are you and your colleagues most concerned about?

**FINDING 8**

While each corporation in the sample cited tailored needs that an organization such as IFYC might provide, all noted that there is currently no “go to” organization to help the sector. All said that a well-thought out and marketed program from IFYC would likely find a strong level of interest from Fortune 100 companies.

With regard to the question of educating on the issue of religious inclusion: “Black people have been saying this. Women have been saying this. Asians have been saying this. So part of this is the natural evolution that as we invite religion and faith into Corporate America, it’s the natural evolution. Because now we’ve got to wake up and say, ‘Are they responsible for educating me? Or am I responsible for educating myself? And then what role does the company play?’ Companies never move as fast employees want them to, and we need help on this one.”

The core questions point to a field still wrestling with balancing risk versus possible benefits of religious inclusion or interfaith engagement. The one common theme among all eight that may provide a window for IFYC is that all agreed there is no “go to” resource to help wrestle with these questions. One DEI executive said he felt like the topic of religious inclusion was in line with the earlier challenges of engaging other identity groups and that the answer for those groups to be included was one of education. The companies that have already begun this process of engaging on religion said that they could have used assistance on everything from stating the value proposition of doing so to ongoing training and development. The five companies that have not entered into the space more deeply said understanding how to assess the “risk-reward” proposition to support implementing might make a difference in engaging religious identity as part of an overall corporate IDEA program.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, IFYC has several possible access points as it seeks to bring its theory of change to corporate America. It is important to note that these recommendations follow an analysis of engagement with only eight percent of the Fortune 100. This relatively small sample may not be statistically significant, but when tied to the broader examination through the REDI Index, which shows an increase in the number of Fortune 100 corporations engaging in the topic of religious inclusion, it provides IFYC with some early clues that may allow it to enter the space an early leader/facilitator of this work. Table 9 breaks these broad recommendations down by research question and findings so each intervention is clear, but these overarching approaches can be synthesized into the following summary recommendations:



RECOMMENDATION 1

IFYC should strengthen its consulting practice to help corporations include interfaith engagement as part of a “collective identity” agenda.

While religious inclusion may appear risky for some corporations, all of the corporate respondents are engaging in cross-pollination through various IDEA topics and are asking questions about how to best engage employees across multiple identity markers. If interfaith engagement were seen as a vehicle for intersectional engagement, it may reduce the risk some see in tackling religion as a standalone topic. Respondents noted that employees are often engaging across multiple identity categories, and if religion were seen as just a missing identity marker, it may appear less controversial.

“IFYC could help with something at the intersection of faith and culture, like Diwali, or looking at the Festival of Lights, all of which have tenets in just about every religion. What if we looked at partnering around where the Asian culture meets the Muslim culture? (This blending) allows for intersectional engagement around the topics they care about.”

Managing across increased cultural diversity can lead to greater resource generation both for employers and employees (Cox & Blake, 1991; Ely & Thomas,

2001). Ely and Thomas shared additional linkages between cultural diversity and greater work group functioning in a Harvard Business Review article. They emphasize that integrating across multiple identities as part of a “learning-and-effectiveness” paradigm can make the integration across cultural differences a resource or learning that allows greater teamwork while increasing a sense of belonging among all employees (Ely & Thomas, 2020). This recommendation draws on IFYC’s existing strengths from its higher education program, as it already consults with higher education leaders in this way, and it mirrors its frame of a multicultural potluck. The organization would likely need to understand corporate organizational systems (versus higher education), but it has already brought on some additional staffing resources as part of its systematic growth that should make this feasible.



RECOMMENDATION 2

IFYC should create an easy-to-use manual for corporations and managers on how to understand the cultural sensitivity of major religious holidays and practices through the lens of employee belonging.

While the research noted the need for greater resources, not all recommendations suggest IFYC need engage broad system change. Many respondents noted that their managers lack basic religious literacy that might help employees feel a greater sense of belonging. For example, one respondent noted that many managers have a full understanding of the ways to wish someone a Merry Christmas, but many employees do not celebrate Christmas at all, and rather celebrate Jewish, Muslim or Hindu holidays.

“It was the first day of Diwali, and I brought in two containers of sweets to celebrate. Our VP walks by and he says, ‘what’s this all about?’ and I said, ‘Oh, well, it’s Diwali, and in India they do this.’ And he says, ‘Oh, well, congratulations!’ And immediately my jaw dropped. All I could think was ‘why are you congratulating me?’ I had to take a step back and realize that he just didn’t know, that his leadership training didn’t prepare him to understand this. I could have just said thanks, but I chose to politely say ‘thank you very much. You can also just say ‘Happy Diwali’ and that’s what he did, but I wish it wasn’t on me to teach him this.”

IFYC could create a manager/user guide to religious literacy as an easy to access resource for corporations who wish to gain greater religious literacy for managers and employees alike. Cash and Gray (2000) outline the acknowledgement and accommodation of key observances and manifestation requests in their framework for religious accommodation. Much of IFYC's existing higher education curriculum uses examples of religious observances to teach how to engage across difference. With existing staff and possible some outside production assistance, this may be an easily implementable recommendation.



RECOMMENDATION 3

IFYC SHOULD CREATE A SUITE OF WORKSHOPS AND TRAININGS TO HELP CORPORATIONS WITH EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT, RISK MITIGATION, AND ENHANCING DIVERSITY AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS.

Respondents all noted a lack of educational resources across three distinct areas: ways to better engage employees across religion or interfaith engagement, risk mitigation, enhancing IDEA programs specifically and ways to think about religious diversity as a market expansion possibility. IFYC has the potential to create a series of workshops and trainings around these broad themes. I explore each separately below.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

IFYC should craft a series of employee engagement workshops that corporations could use to discuss engaging across difference while respecting boundaries. This duality is critical, as all respondents said it does no good to engage religious diversity at the expense of those who may not claim any religion. This could include specifically a series of webinars or trainings specifically for managers around how to respond to and engage employees asking about or not wanting religious engagement. Lips-Wiersma et al (2009) note that religious and interfaith inclusion can deepen overall employee engagement and emotional stability on the job if handled correctly. To do so, however, IFYC must help corporations address those 72 percent of Americans who view religion as a topic not fit for work (Piyawan et al., 2020).

“The number one conversation going on today in business is ‘the great resignation, the great reassessment’ by our employees. What is it going to take to attract the best of the best? If we don’t allow employees to self-actualize at work, if you don’t allow them to build a community of belonging, as long as it’s not against something else, which every company will have a version of in their values, then you run the risk of alienation and more.”

IFYC’s engagement curricula should focus on overall belonging versus being seen as pushing religion onto a once secular sector. Following Hicks’ (2003) concept of a “respectful pluralism at work,” IFYC must be careful to balance all needs in its curricular approach. This is a core competency for IFYC, as its higher education program operates from this same principle, of seeing American society as a multicultural potluck where all “can share a meal” versus inviting someone to the table at the exclusion of others.

RISK MITIGATION

IFYC has an opportunity to create workshops and trainings that help corporations create programs with defined boundaries, education sessions around legal risks and remedies and ways to make interfaith inclusion a brand builder versus brand risk.

“We need to negotiate what’s in and what’s out of bounds. A lot of companies don’t know how to navigate intra-communities and inter-community conversations. What does the structure need to look like?”

Cash and Gray (2000) underscore this beyond an employee base, indicating that such inclusion might impact customers as well as internal culture. IFYC has some background here, as it regularly engages with public colleges and universities who have strict guidelines around religious inclusion. Entering into this space with corporations may result in the organization needing to bring on additional resources to understand the legal issues in the corporate field, which may be costly.

ENHANCING IDEA PROGRAMS

Respondents talked mostly about engaging religion from a place of compliance as the first marker in the IDEA space. IFYC should create trainings that move along a new continuum: compliance to knowledge to engagement to belonging. IFYC should develop a broad cultural sensitivity training playbook that allows for interfaith engagement to be included in a corporation’s inclusion strategy with belonging as its ultimate destination. Respondents noted a leadership void in this area and indicated that for this to be an effective strategy, leadership other than those in charge of IDEA must be mobilized. IFYC should develop leadership training programs that help embed this bigger picture in the IDEA frame for top leadership.

“Inclusion is the work. That’s the action. That’s what I call the ‘heavy lifting.’ Belonging is the outcome we need. How do I leverage and develop leaders as an opportunity to deepen allyship and understanding and belonging?”

IFYC’s programmatic approach is in alignment with this approach, as the organization has created programs that blend religious and secular identities with a goal of being valued. While some tailored curricula may need to be developed, its existing programs contain much raw material with which to work.



RECOMMENDATION 4

IFYC should define the value proposition for interfaith engagement as part of a broader business imperative.

Corporate respondents noted that IFYC must create a distinct value proposition if it is to move the narrative around interfaith or religious inclusion from risk to a tool of belonging that serves both the employee and employer. As the organization rebrands under the moniker “Interfaith America,” this value proposition work is key.

IFYC must create a value proposition that frames interfaith engagement as a business imperative, breaking its approach into 1) religious/interfaith literacy, 2) employee engagement and leadership development, and 3) demonstrating how interfaith engagement can advance overall corporate strategies, internally and externally.

Respondents all acknowledged there was a lack of a “go to” organization for this work despite what most saw as a growing need. Given the ongoing sensitivity and feelings of risk of direct religious engagement, IFYC’s approach to religious

pluralism, where people of all faiths and none can come together to create solutions, could be a powerful part of this value proposition. Particular attention should be paid to the ways in which the organization frames this value proposition for people who do not have a particular faith, are agnostic or atheist. While the organization's new name of Interfaith America may speak to people of defined faith traditions, it may serve as a roadblock for people in these categories. Creating a true value proposition of inclusion must take into account this consideration.

“So, what is the pain point that needs to be solved and where can faith play a unique role in solving a different kind of problem? If IFYC can define that, they're going to get a lot more adoption from that because there's a basic urgency around solving a different kind of problem these days.”

IFYC's has a chance to capitalize off of the trend of the “great resignation” as a chance to make a case that interfaith engagement could be a valuable recruiting and retention tool while harnessing its benefits (Gelb & Longacre, 2012).

Lastly, as corporations seek increased creativity and innovation to gain a competitive foothold, IFYC has a chance to make the case that interfaith engagement is an essential part of an overall management of multiple identities strategy. If they articulate the ways in which including religion as a key identity category creates greater “resource production,” (Creary et. al, 2015), they will find a strong value proposition to advance their own theory of change.

Table 9

Summary of Findings and Recommendations by Study Question.

Study Question	Findings	Recommendations/Interventions
<p>In what ways does religious diversity express itself, if at all, in selected corporate culture currently? How do corporations represent faith and religion in their diversity policies and programs?</p>	<p>1. Unlike other areas of IDEA, corporations in the sample set engage religion or interfaith diversity far less and most do not have a clear strategy on how to tackle the issue as part of a broader diversity agenda. While all interviewed organizations acknowledge the EEOC mandate to protect against religious discrimination, only two engaged in a robust program of religious inclusion and interfaith engagement. This was primarily through the vehicle of an ERG.</p>	<p>IFYC should strengthen its consulting practice to help corporations include interfaith engagement as part of a “collective identity” agenda. Most corporations are engaging in cross-pollination through various ERG topics. If interfaith engagement were seen as a vehicle for intersectional engagement, it may reduce the risk many see by tackling religion straight on (WM98)</p>
	<p>2. Issues of religious accommodation are present in 7/8 of those interviewed. These most commonly express themselves through making observances of religious holidays easier, acknowledging sensitivity around food choices in corporate facilities, etc. 62.5 percent of those interviewed, however, do not actively bring interfaith or religious discussions into their overall corporate environment.</p>	<p>IFYC could create an easy-to-use manual for corporations and managers on how to understand the cultural sensitivity of major religious holidays and practices through the lens of employee engagement (Parth Diwali comment, 2/12, 5/11)</p>
<p>What are the conditions in which corporations might engage in a program of interfaith engagement with employees? What constraints might they feel/experience in doing so?</p>	<p>3. Corporations would engage religion or interfaith diversity for two primary reasons: 1) to allow for deeper employee satisfaction and engagement in the workplace, and 2) if it proved to advance overall corporate strategy objectives.</p>	<p>IFYC should craft a series of employee engagement workshops that corporations could use to discuss engaging across difference while respecting boundaries while also creating a series of webinars or trainings specifically for managers around how to tackle employees asking about or not wanting religious engagement.</p>
	<p>4. There is deep concern among 5/8 of those interviewed about how to engage religious diversity while preventing proselytization, avoiding legal risks, or allowing for religious dogma to negatively impact the corporate brand.</p>	<p>IFYC has an opportunity to create workshops and trainings that help corporations create programs with defined boundaries, education sessions around legal risks and remedies and ways to make interfaith inclusion a brand builder vs. brand risk.</p>
<p>What skills are necessary to engage religious diversity in the workplace?</p>	<p>5. Corporations in the interview sample cited a lack of leadership training on the ways to engage religion and interfaith engagement both at the C-suite level and the middle management level as skills missing from advancing this work.</p>	<p>Respondents talked about engaging religion from a place of compliance. IFYC should create trainings that move beyond DEI leadership alone along a new continuum: compliance to knowledge to engagement to belonging.</p>

Study Question	Findings	Recommendations/Interventions
<p>What outcomes might participating corporations find of value to encourage such participation? What opportunities might emerge from engaging religious diversity (i.e., innovation in product lines, workforce cohesion, market expansion)?</p>	<p>6. Corporations in the sample set acknowledged that successful engagement across deep-level diversity difference, including interfaith diversity, would be a value add to overall strategy, team building and culture, recruiting and retention efforts and that they might engage in this space if they could reduce the risk.</p>	<p>IFYC must create a value proposition that frames interfaith engagement as a business imperative, breaking its approach into 1) education/awareness, 2) “people engagement” and policy formation, and use the “great resignation” as a chance to show value add for interfaith engagement.</p>
<p>What are the obstacles to addressing religion in the workplace?</p>	<p>7. Corporations in the sample set cited the lack of a “playbook” to engage in religious or interfaith diversity. Of those not currently attempting such engagement, fears of legal risk and harming existing corporate culture were cited. Of those who have engaged, many cited early setbacks because of the lack of deep knowledge on how best to begin such an engagement.</p>	<p>IFYC should develop a broad cultural sensitivity training playbook that allows for interfaith engagement to be included in a corporation’s inclusion strategy. Respondents noted risk in terms of not knowing how to engage and fearing that would lead to legal or reputational risk. If IFYC can engage around skill building, some resistance may wane.</p>
<p>To gauge specific program possibilities and to aid in the crafting of recommendations, a focused question was asked about possible programs that might be of use.</p>	<p>8. While each corporation in the sample cited tailored needs that an organization such as IFYC might provide, all noted that there is currently no “go to” organization to help the sector. All said that a well-thought out and marketed program from IFYC would likely find a strong level of interest from Fortune 100 companies.</p>	<p>Corporations noted that IFYC must create a distinct value proposition if it is to move the narrative around interfaith or religious inclusion from risk to a tool of belonging that serves both the employee and employer. As the organization rebrands under the moniker “Interfaith America,” this value proposition work is key.</p>

Conclusion

The topic of religion has a complicated history in the United States, a country that is often cited as among the most religious in the world while also a nation that has the “separation of church and state” enshrined in its organizing and founding documents. While corporations are not nations and many of the Fortune 100 conduct business throughout the world, most corporate cultures and policies has maintained a deep sense of the secular. This study sought to determine whether IFYC, an organization that believes leaders and institutions can use religious diversity as a strength, could bring more than two decades of experience in the higher education space to the corporate sector.

This study also bumps up against a generational discussion of inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility, not only in the workplace but in all aspects of society, here and abroad. While issues of race, gender, sexual identity and other markers have been included in IDEA approaches, religious diversity ranks least in engagement. This lack of inclusion is not without merit, with religious inclusion being cited as a deep legal and cultural risk.

Using the lens of Conservation Resource Theory, in general, and Creary et al.’s (2015) typology of resource utilization for managing multiple identities, I probed ways that IFYC might consider bringing its theory of change to the corporate sector, with all of the complexities that engaging with religion can bring. While my sample size was small, when it was integrated with broader surveys of the Fortune 100, I believe it provides IFYC with a viable roadmap should it wish to engage the sector. Further research studies might look at the corporate sector beyond the Fortune 100, as this group’s resources and approaches may not be applicable to smaller corporations. It is also worth noting that my research was conducted through a U.S.-centric cultural lens. What works in America may not be transferrable to all cultures.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: INTERNAL IFYC DOCUMENT REFERENCES

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Starbucks Coffee Company. (2021). *Third Place Discussions: Nurturing Religious Diversity featuring Eboo Patel.*

APPENDIX B: IFYC INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

The following individuals with corresponding positions were chosen in consultation with IFYC:

- Eboo Patel, President and Founder
- Amber Hacker, Vice President of Operations and Finance
- Megan Hughes Johnson, Senior Consultant for Strategic Initiatives
- Jenan Mohajir, Senior Director of Leadership
- Katie Bringman Baxter, Vice President of Program Strategy
- Mary Ellen Giess, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives
- Carolyn Roncolato, Director of Academic Initiatives
- Hannah Willage Director of Alumni Leadership
- Shauna Morin, Research Fellow
- Carr Harkrader, Director of Interfaith Leadership Institute
- Langston Ward, Program Manager

APPENDIX C: PROTOCOL FOR IFYC PROGRAM INTERVIEWS

1. Why do you believe a move into the corporate arena is important for IFYC’s mission? How does such a move enable IFYC to expand its theory of change?
2. What elements of the existing higher education program design do you think will be applicable to the proposed corporate program engagement?
3. How will you measure success/impact of the proposed new program?
4. Which elements of the proposed program design do you believe will be beneficial to your corporate partners?
5. What does success look like in five years if you get this project off the ground?

APPENDIX D: WEBSITE ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS INCLUSION IN FORTUNE 100 COMPANIES

Used the following decision rules when studying corporate websites: focus on employees, internal policies, workplace and internal culture. Did not include suppliers, vendors, partners.

Key search terms: company name, diversity and inclusion policy, religion, interfaith. Conducted no more than three to five clicks into the subpages to find evidence of religious inclusion or diversity. Researched each corporation’s IDEA policy to see if religion or faith was mentioned. While all corporate sites list some form of EEO statement, did not qualify this as a specific focus on religion or interfaith in IDEA. Note the limitation: accommodations may not be made at policy level and therefore may not be included on overall sites. While “religion” or “interfaith” were search words, many corporations list “different cultures.” Did not count this as qualifying.

Corporation	Corporation has a Diversity Policy/ Statement on website	Corporation lists Religion or Faith in Listed Diversity Policy	Systems that Support Religion Expression (Affinity Groups/Employee Resource Groups)	Corporate IDEA website
Walmart	Y	N		https://corporate.walmart.com/global-responsibility/culture-di-
Amazon	Y	N		https://www.aboutamazon.com/workplace/diversity-inclusion
Apple	Y	N		https://www.apple.com/diversity/
CVS Health	Y	N		https://cvshealth.com/about-cvs-health/diversity
UnitedHealth Group	Y	N		https://www.unitedhealthgroup.com/content/sustainability/en/
Berkshire Hathaway	N	N		https://www.berkshirehathaway.com/
McKesson	Y	N		https://www.mckesson.com/About-McKesson/Corporate-Citizen-
AmerisourceBergen	Y	N		https://amerisourcebergen.com/about-us/diversity-and-inclusion
Alphabet	N	N		https://abc.xyz/
ExxonMobil	Y	N		https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/-/media/Global/Files/careers/

Corporation	Corporation has a Diversity Policy/ Statement on website	Corporation lists Religion or Faith in Listed Diversity Policy	Systems that Support Religion Expression (Affinity Groups/Employee Resource Groups)	Corporate IDEA website
AT&T	Y	N		https://about.att.com/pages/diversity
Costco Wholesale	Y	Y		https://www.costco.com/inclusion.html
Cigna	Y	N		https://www.cigna.com/about-us/corporate-responsibility/report/
Cardinal Health	Y	N		https://www.cardinalhealth.com/en/about-us/our-people/diversi-
Microsoft	Y	N		https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/diversity/default.aspx
Walgreen Boots Alliance	Y	N		https://www.walgreensbootsalliance.com/about-us/diversity-eq-
Kroger	Y	N		https://www.thekrogerco.com/community/standing-together/
Home Depot	Y	N		https://corporate.homedepot.com/responsibility/people/diversi-
JPMorgan Chase	Y	N		https://www.jpmorganchase.com/about/people-culture/diversi-
Verizon Communications	Y	Y		https://www.verizon.com/about/our-company/diversity-and-in-
Ford Motor	Y	N		https://corporate.ford.com/careers/inclusive-hiring/diversity.html
General Motors	Y	N		https://www.gm.com/stories/dei-report
Anthem	Y	N		https://www.anthemcorporateresponsibility.com/diversity-and-in-
Centene	Y	N		https://www.centene.com/who-we-are/diversity-and-inclusion.
Fannie Mae	Y	Y	X	https://www.fanniemae.com/about-us/who-we-are/diversi-
Comcast	Y	N		https://corporate.comcast.com/impact/diversity-equity-inclusion
Chevron	Y	N		https://www.chevron.com/sustainability/social/diversity-inclusion
Dell Technologies	Y	N		https://corporate.delltechnologies.com/en-us/social-impact/re-
Bank of America	Y	N		https://about.bankofamerica.com/en/working-here/diversity-in-
Target	Y	N		https://corporate.target.com/corporate-responsibility/diversi-
Lowe's	Y	N		https://corporate.lowes.com/careers/joining-our-team/diversi-
Marathon Petroleum	Y	N		https://www.marathonpetroleum.com/Sustainability/Diversity-Eq-
CitiGroup	Y	N		https://www.citigroup.com/citi/diversity/
Facebook	Y	Y	X	https://diversity.fb.com/
UPS	Y	N		https://about.ups.com/us/en/social-impact/diversity-equi-
Johnson & Johnson	Y	N		https://www.jnj.com/about-jnj/diversity
Wells Fargo	Y	N		https://www.wellsfargo.com/about/diversity/diversity-and-inclu-
General Electric	Y	N		https://www.ge.com/about-us/diversity
State Farm Insurance	Y	N		https://www.statefarm.com/about-us/diversity-inclusion
Intel	Y	N		https://www.intel.com/content/www/us/en/policy/policy-diversi-
Humana	Y	N		https://careers.humana.com/inclusion-and-diversity-2/#:~:tex-
IBM	Y	N		https://www.ibm.com/impact/be-equal/
Procter & Gamble	Y	N		https://us.pg.com/equality-and-inclusion/
PepsiCo	Y	N		https://www.pepsico.com/about/diversity-equity-and-inclusion
FedEx	Y	N		https://www.fedex.com/en-us/about/diversity-inclusion.html
MetLife	Y	N		https://www.metlife.com/about-us/global-diversity-equity-inclu-
Freddie Mac	Y	N		http://www.freddiemac.com/about/diversity/#:~:text=As%20
Philips 66	Y	Y		https://www.phillips66.com/uk/inclusion-and-diversity
Lockheed Martin	Y	N		https://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/who-we-are/global-diver-
Walt Disney	Y	N		https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/diversity-inclusion/
Archer Daniels Midland	Y	N		https://www.adm.com/news/stories/diversity-inclu-
Albertsons	Y	Y		https://www.albertsonscorporation.com/our-values/diversityand-
Valero Energy	Y	N		https://www.valero.com/careers/working-valero/diversity-inclu-
Boeing	Y	N		https://www.boeing.com/principles/diversity-and-inclusion/index.
Prudential Financial	Y	Y		https://www.prudential.com/links/about/diversity-inclusion

Corporation	Corporation has a Diversity Policy/ Statement on website	Corporation lists Religion or Faith in Listed Diversity Policy	Systems that Support Religion Expression (Affinity Groups/Employee Resource Groups)	Corporate IDEA website
HP	Y	Y		https://www.hp.com/us-en/hp-information/about-hp/diversity/
Raytheon Technologies	Y	N		https://www.rtx.com/social-impact/diversity-equity-inclusion
StoneX Group	N	N		https://www.goldmansachs.com/our-commitments/diversi-
Goldman Sachs Group	Y	Y		https://www.goldmansachs.com/our-commitments/diversi-
Sysco	Y	N		https://www.sysco.com/About/Our-People/Diversity-and-Inclu-
Morgan Stanley	Y	N		https://www.morganstanley.com/about-us/diversity
HCA Healthcare	Y	N		https://hcahealthcare.com/about/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/
Cisco Systems	Y	N		https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/about/inclusion-diversity.html
Charter Communications	Y	N		https://corporate.charter.com/diversity-inclusion#:~:text=Diver-
Merck	Y	Y	X	https://www.merck.com/company-overview/diversity-and-inclu-
Best Buy	Y	N		https://corporate.bestbuy.com/diversity-and-inclusion/
New York Life Insurance	Y	N		https://www.newyorklife.com/careers/our-culture/diversity-and-in-
AbbVie	Y	N		https://www.abbvie.com/our-company/equality-inclusion-diver-
Publix Super Markets	Y	N		https://corporate.publix.com/about-publix/culture/commit-
Allstate	Y	Y		https://www.allstate.com/diversity.aspx
Liberty Mutual Insurance Group	Y	N		https://jobs.libertymutualgroup.com/diversity-equity-inclusion/
AIG	Y	Y	X	https://www.aig.com/about-us/diversity-equity-and-inclusion
Tyson Foods	Y	N		https://www.tysonfoods.com/who-we-are/our-people/inclu-
Progressive	Y	N		https://www.progressive.com/about/diversity-and-inclusion/
Bristol Myers Squibb	Y	N		https://www.bms.com/about-us/global-diversity-and-inclusion.
Nationwide	Y	Y		https://www.nationwide.com/personal/about-us/diversity-equi-
Pfizer	Y	N		https://careers.pfizer.com/en/diversity-inclusion
Caterpillar	Y	N		https://www.caterpillar.com/en/careers/why-caterpillar/diversi-
TIAA	Y	N		https://www.tiaa.org/public/about-tiaa/diversity-inclusion
Oracle	Y	Y		https://www.oracle.com/corporate/careers/diversity-inclusion/
Energy Transfer	N	N		https://www.energytransfer.com/corporate-responsibility/
Dow	Y	N		https://corporate.dow.com/en-us/about/company/be-
American Express	Y	Y	X	https://www.americanexpress.com/us/company/global-diversi-
General Dynamics	Y	N		https://www.gd.com/careers/diversity
Nike	Y	N		https://purpose.nike.com/diversity-equity-inclusion
Northrop Grumman	Y	N		https://www.northropgrumman.com/corporate-responsibility/
USAA	Y	N		https://www.usaa.com/inet/wc/about_usaa_corporate_diversi-
Deere	Y	N		https://www.deere.com/en/our-company/john-deere-careers/
Abbott Laboratories	Y	N		https://www.abbott.com/careers/diversity-and-inclusion.html
Northwestern Mutual	Y	N		https://www.northwesternmutual.com/our-commitment-to-diver-
Dollar General	Y	N		https://careers.dollargeneral.com/diversity-inclusion/
Exelon	Y	Y		https://www.exeloncorp.com/newsroom/Pages/diversity-and-in-
Coca-Cola	Y	N		https://www.coca-colacompany.com/shared-future/diversi-
Honeywell International	Y	N		https://www.honeywell.com/us/en/company/inclusion-and-di-
Thermo Fisher Scientific	Y	N		https://corporate.thermofisher.com/us/en/index/corporate-so-
3M	Y	N		https://www.3m.com/3M/en_US/careers-us/working-at-3m/diver-
TJX	Y	N		https://jobs.tjx.com/content/Why-TJX-Inclusion/?locale=en_US
Travelers	Y	Y		https://www.travelers.com/about-travelers/diversity
Capital One Financial	Y	N		https://www.capitalone.com/diversity/
Tesla	N	N		https://tesla.com

APPENDIX E: EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATING CORPORATE INTERVIEWS

Dear NAME HERE,

As the concluding thesis of my doctoral studies at Vanderbilt University, I am working with Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) as they consider how to dramatically expand their impact by engaging the corporate sector in a program of interfaith engagement with their employee base.

IFYC is a national non-profit working toward an America where people of different faiths, worldviews, and traditions can bridge differences and find common values to build a shared life together. IFYC incorporated as a 501(c)3 non-profit in 2002 in the wake of the September 11th attacks on the United States, a time when interfaith cooperation was perhaps most needed but least supported. The organization slowly created formal programs, launched campaigns, and convened national gatherings where hundreds showed up. Between 2003 and 2011, IFYC tripled its staff and launched programs ranging from interfaith service around Chicago to dialogue initiatives in the Middle East, South Africa, and India. They partnered with the Clinton Global Initiative and Queen Rania of Jordan to create an international exchange program. IFYC collaborated with the Tony Blair Faith Foundation to develop a fellows program that brought together young leaders to serve as interfaith ambassadors to the United Nations, focusing on malaria.

Now the organization is moving beyond its youth-based programming to understand ways in which its theory of change might benefit a broader group of stakeholders. My doctoral dissertation specifically examines whether corporate America might be an appropriate conduit by adding interfaith engagement as part of a corporation's broader DEI strategy.

I would like to interview you to learn more about the ways in which COMPANY NAME has thought through its own DEI agenda and whether religion or interfaith engagement has or might be a dimension of it.

The Zoom session should take about 45-60 minutes. Participation is voluntary and your response will be kept anonymous. You will have the option to not respond to any question that you choose. Vanderbilt University has an NDA that I would be happy to execute as part of the project.

I would welcome the chance to add your learnings to my overall doctoral studies.
Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael E. Hill
President, Chautauqua Institution
Doctoral Candidate, Vanderbilt University

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR CORPORATE INTERVIEWS

My primary research question is this: Under what conditions might major corporations engage in a program of interfaith engagement with their employee base to allow IFYC's theory of change to expand beyond its traditional/predominant boundaries? In pursuing this question, I will more deeply explore:

1. In what ways does religious diversity currently express itself, if at all, in selected corporate cultures? How do corporations represent faith and religion in their diversity policies and programs, if at all?
2. Under what conditions might corporations consider engaging in a program of interfaith engagement with employees? What are corporate perceptions of the constraints they might feel/experience in doing so?
3. What skills do corporate leaders believe are necessary to engage religious or interfaith diversity in the workplace?
4. What outcomes might corporations find of value to encourage such participation? What opportunities might emerge from engaging religious diversity (i.e., innovation in product lines, workforce cohesion, market expansion)?
5. What are the obstacles or risks inherent in addressing religion or interfaith engagement in the workplace? Is the return-on-investment worthy of tackling those obstacles or risks?

To gauge specific program possibilities and to aid in the crafting of recommendations, a focused question was asked about possible programs that might be of use:

6. IFYC is beginning to take its 15 years of experience and expertise in higher ed and bring it to the corporate sector. Which of these is most important to you:
 - a. Inspiration/Awareness-raising
 - b. Training and skill-building
 - c. Policies and procedures
 - d. Launching an Interfaith Employee Resource Group
7. For companies who are already working on this:
 - a. What concrete activities have you done that have been successful?
 - b. What impact have you seen?
 - c. What are you and your colleagues most concerned about?

VANDERBILT



Peabody College

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