The Ethnically Diverse Workplace

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The Ethnically Diverse Workplace: Experience of Immigrant Indian Professionals in Australia

BY

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2023

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80382-054-5 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-80382-053-8 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-80382-055-2 (Epub)

ISOQAR certified
Management System,
awarded to Emerald
for adherence to
Environmental
standard
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to

My love and my life Neeraj and Simran – you are the wind beneath my wings

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Contents

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Abbreviations

AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CSAM	Citizenship's Continuous Survey of Australian Migrants
CSOL	Consolidated Sponsored Occupation List
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DIMIA	Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
ESB	English-speaking Background
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
NESB	Non-English-speaking Background
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OQU	Overseas Qualification Unit
PEP	Professional Experience Program
SAP	System and Applications Product
SIE	Self-initiated Expatriate
SOL	Skilled Occupation List
TAFE	Technical and Future Education
WWII	World War II

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About the Author

Dr. Sunaina Gowan is a seasoned Higher Education academic who has worked in Education and Management for over 21 years. During this period, she has distinguished herself in higher education administration by serving in governance roles, promoting education, and working for humanitarian causes. She has taught a range of business and communication courses at several higher education institutions. Her research interests include student development and belonging, cultural diversity, environmental concerns, principles of responsible business and education, inclusiveness, and emotional labour. Her experience is in organisational capability development, multiliteracies pedagogies, internationalisation of education, sociocultural approaches to identity, and constructing sustainable operations.

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Preface

I've always wanted to write a book. When I finally chose to pursue it, I had no idea it would lead me on a journey of personal highs and lows while writing about immigrants' experiences, particularly immigrant Indian professionals in Australia. I arrived in Australia in 2004, having left a comfortable life in Delhi, India, to join my husband, who had been accepted into a leading Business School in Sydney. Family and friends had questioned our choice to immigrate and leave behind our secure, well-paying careers for student life in Sydney. It was my idea to migrate. Growing up in Fargo, North Dakota, I had a strong yearning to return to 'western civilisation'. Why Australia, specifically? I'm still unsure. In retrospect, I believe I would have been happier returning to the society in which I grew up, and I often wonder what I would have done if I had returned to the United States. We didn't have a strong internet connection in India at the time, so information was limited. We decided to pack up and move here.

Do I regret my decision? Yes and no. Australia has been very kind to us. We established our professional career path quickly and have never looked back. Certainly, it's not been easy. I could connect to most of the protagonists' stories as I was writing this book. Today, I feel proud of the many awards and accolades I have received in my academic career over the years, happy to be a professional, a wife, and a proud mother to a daughter who has excelled in her Honours Program in Law. We, like any other immigrants, have worked hard to fulfil our aspirations of owning a home, having dogs to play with in the backyard, and forming a social network of friends who became family. As first-generation immigrants, my husband and I often reminisce about our past life in India, while our daughter politely shows interest in our happy memories. I often wonder how her life must be – caught between two cultures? We are mindful of this and hopefully have succeeded in giving her the freedom to flourish as a young Australian.

Have I personally experienced racism or prejudice in Australia? No, contrary to several of the book's respondents. Have I encountered the well-known glass and bamboo ceiling? Yes. Despite my degrees and job experience, I have often been passed over for top management positions by Anglo Saxon's. I have gone through what some of the respondents in this book have experienced and am slowly coming to terms with it. My fiery spirit and drive to prove what an ethnic immigrant woman can do has been smothered on several occasions. Is it because of my race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin? I am often left wondering.

I had to study local degrees and get local work experience before getting a role in higher education, like some of the stories in this book. Despite having extensive experience in my field and a degree in business administration from India, I knew I needed to upgrade my skills and qualifications if I wanted to compete in the local job market. Be ready for it and be prepared to put in a lot of hard work once you arrive. When you find yourself in a mostly white setting, you will feel strange and doubt your abilities. You will go through everyday emotional labour if you are not 'like them'. Do not get burned out. Persist and never second-guess yourself, and you will shine, since Indians are diligent workers who are loyal and trustworthy.

The growing body of research on skilled immigrant professionals has various underlying assumptions that produce a negative narrative. In the literature, skilled immigrants are described as being treated unfairly in the host country, losing their status, and struggling in the host job market. This book examines the careers of skilled immigrants as seen through the eyes of a group of 20 Indian professionals living and working in Australia. As a result of increased worker mobility and growing worldwide demand for highly trained personnel, skilled immigration has become a key component of local and international economies, especially Australia. Even though qualified immigrants who make a significant career change by relocating to a new country can bring comparative advantage for businesses, they are frequently excluded from the workforce. In the host country, their degrees, abilities, and experiences are generally perceived as lacking. Indeed, the evidence 'points to a prevalent perception of barriers and impediments', with skilled immigrants often having poor job prospects. The struggles of these immigrant Indian professionals as they strive to reconstruct their professions and lives in Australia are recounted in this book.

Without the 20 immigrant Indian professionals who shared their personal stories with me during my PhD journey as a qualitative researcher, this book would not have been possible. I would like to express my gratitude for their faith in me to portray their triumphs and tribulations as they navigate their lives in this beautiful country, they now call home. I also want to thank Emerald publications' Iram Satti, David Mulvaney, Sangeetha Rajan, and Dheebika Veerasamy for their patience and direction while I wrote this book. This book would not have been conceivable if my husband and daughter had not encouraged me to pursue my desire of publishing my own book. For all eternity, I love you both.

Introduction

The aim of my book is to share the perceived experiences, if any, of inclusionary and exclusionary organisational practices and how they impact the emotional labour of immigrant Indian professionals. This book details the lives and experiences of first-generation immigrant Indian professionals in Australia, based largely on around 20 in-depth interviews. Most of the exclusionary practices that occur are informal consisting of a mix of interpersonal dynamics and institutional behaviours that create opportunities for some workers and problems for others. Beyond the context of formal policies and regulations, I sought to assess if profiling and discriminatory behaviours towards immigrant Indian professionals exist in Australian organisations.

This book will help readers recognise and comprehend the dynamics of the Indian diaspora in Australia, as well as the interplay of their involvement in Australian companies. Many claims of discrimination against Indians or stereotyping due to accent, skin colour, or ethnicity are anecdotal and are elucidated by these professionals. Although their experiences are the heart of this book, I have also drawn examples and inspiration from immigrants beyond those interviewed for this book and whose stories appear in other scholarly works. There are some common themes, experiences, and events that immigrants in general commonly experience when they move to other countries or regions of the world.

Australia is a multicultural country. India accounted for the largest proportion of total global migration of 272 million as at 2019, with more than 17.5 million migrants. Medical experts, engineers, researchers, managers, and academics account for half of all Indian immigration to economically advanced countries, opposed to barely 10 percent to developing countries (United Nations, 2019). In developed countries, India is ranked as one of the most highly regarded providers of skilled professionals. In general, the Indian diaspora is regarded as a 'model minority', with many talented members and skilled people. It is especially the case for Indians living in more developed nations such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

During a time of racial awakening, Australian organisations have found themselves wanting and having to address workplace racism but finding it difficult to do the same. New immigrants to Australia experience racism, prejudice, and xenophobia on a daily basis as per the Diversity Council of Australia Report, 2020. The improper utilisation of skilled immigrants' abilities is a human capital

The Ethnically Diverse Workplace: Experience of Immigrant Indian Professionals in Australia, 1–7

doi:10.1108/978-1-80382-053-820221010

priority with major ramifications for Australia's skilled migration strategy. Skilled immigrants that are unable to gain employment in their preferred profession waste their talents and, over time, their skills decline. Companies have been hesitant to recruit foreign-trained skilled immigrants, owing to their expertise and credentials not being recognised by Australian organisations. In Australia, the need for different skill sets might drive immigrants into low-wage survival areas of work or compel them to go through extensive certification and training.

Discrimination of immigrants based on race is widespread in organisations in Australia. Asian, Middle Eastern, and African-born people face a higher risk. Race-based discrimination usually has severe consequences for both victims and offenders, resulting in substantial social and economic costs. There is overwhelming evidence that it can lead to poor health, particularly mental health issues like stress and unhappiness (Reid & Boyce, 1995). Poor job performance, decreased organisational commitment, engagement, loyalty, contentment, and satisfaction, as well as heightened scepticism, tardiness, and employee turnover, are all linked to race-based intolerance at work. Vicarious racism and encountering racism can both have harmful impacts. Addressing complaints through official complaint methods is costly, and proven allegations of race-based discrimination can result in significant legal expenses for workplaces and organisations.

Immigrants might endure severe physiological, psychological, and financial expenses as a result of racial discrimination. There is compelling evidence that racial discrimination promotes mental health problems such as anxiety and despair (Paradies, 2006; Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). Exclusion based on ethnicity is linked to low employee engagement, poor motivation and performance, commitment, trust, satisfaction, and self-esteem, as well as increased scepticism, absenteeism, and high turnover (Blank et al., 2004; Buttner et al., 2010; Holder & Vaux, 1998). Workplace discriminatory practices based on race or ethnicity result in lost productivity, skills, and innovations (Berman, 2008).

Race-based discrimination can occur on a systemic and/or interpersonal level in the workplace. Stigmatisation can lead to non-recognition of credentials and underemployment on a systemic level (Berman, 2008). It can also result in unnecessary and unjust differences in work assignment, status, workloads, performance review, mentoring, advancement, pay and benefits, firing, dismissals, retirement, and absenteeism and turnover among employees of different racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. As a result, employee satisfaction, involvement, belonging, motivation, loyalty, and intention to quit may differ significantly across racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds (Paradies et al., 2009).

Interpersonal discrimination occurs when people interact in ways that result in unjust and avoidable inequities between groups. In the workplace, interpersonal prejudice can take both explicit and subtle forms. Harassing, disrespect, name-calling, verbal/physical assault, unjust performance evaluation, and termination biases are some of the most apparent types. In certain circumstances, jokes and taunting can exacerbate existing preconceptions and lead to persons being excluded from professional and social activities. Humour, on the other hand, if

used carefully, can serve as a social glue, assisting in the building of bridging capital and promoting anti-racist goals by making light of differences and decreasing friction across groups (Loosemore et al., 2010).

Interpersonal discrimination can sometimes take the shape of supposedly good and well-intentioned actions that unfortunately lead to gaps in opportunity, resources, or rewards. This might take the form of excessively glowing praise, excessive assistance, providing unduly simple work, or tokenistic engagement in the workplace. As a result of such behaviour, the chances of gaining further expertise, learning, skill, and talent are undermined (Dipboye & Colella, 2013). Also, the presence of unfavourable preconceptions can have a negative impact on immigrants work performance. This is known as stigmatisation, and it arises when a negative stereotype about a group applies to an event or activity. By just asking about group affiliation before the task, unfavourable perceptions about specific minority groups having poorer intelligence quotient (IQ) can lead to poor performance on cognitive exercises. This impact is especially prominent in workplaces when people of different ethnicity are present (Kirnan et al., 2009). The danger of stereotyping can cause employees to work more but less productively, and this is especially true among highly skilled immigrants (Roberson & Kulik, 2007). Intimidation, unfair treatment, rude behaviour, marginalisation, intense monitoring, verbal/physical abusive behaviour, harsh performance appraisal, and firing in the workplace, as well as exaggeratedly glowing reviews, overly zealous assisting, allocating overly small jobs, or tokenistic involvement, are all examples of interpersonal discrimination.

While having access is critical, the experience of bias does not end there. Inclusion does not imply that there will be no prejudice. Discrimination might still happen during or after inclusion. Exclusion after employment might be more subtle, leading to exclusion from company networks and formal/informal groups. Systemic race-based workplace discrimination exists when workers of different ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds face unnecessary and harsh disparities in hiring, work allocation, opportunities for advancement, role overload, performance appraisal, mentoring, recognition, pay and benefits, demotion, dismissals, and government pension. As a result, significant difference in absences, contentment, engagement, affiliation, drive, loyalty, and turnover intentions emerge among employees of different cultural backgrounds.

Race-based discrimination has detrimental consequences for both targeted and offenders on a deeper level. It can cause 'trauma, harm, shame, infuriate, frustrate, and eventually disadvantage' to those who are affected (Harrell, 2000, p. 42). People who perpetrate racial discrimination may face serious consequences, warping their personality and worldviews, with some correlation among reported levels of sadness and prejudicial sentiments (Borooah & Mangan, 2002). There is substantial evidence that racism leads to poor well-being, mainly mental health and wellness issues including worry, despair, and strain, as well as a sense of hopelessness (Paradies, 2006; Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). Individuals who experience racial prejudice are often more likely to be overweight or obese, as well as indulge in unhealthy habits including smoking and drug and alcohol abuse. While the evidence is mixed, several studies demonstrate

a link with racism and newborn low-birth weight as well as heart attack and stroke. Growing evidence of a correlation with variables known to elevate the risk of heart attack and stroke supports the link with heart disease.

Kamenou (2007) found that the perception of difficulties imposed by workplace discrimination can lead to certain employees self-limiting their career options (Gainor & Forrest, 1991; Spokane & Richardson, 1992). Vicarious discrimination can also have a detrimental impact on a person's career (Kulik & Roberson, 2008). Having to witness discrimination aimed at a colleague can also have negative effects on well-being equivalent to that experienced by the primary victim of such prejudice. As a result of proven incidents of race-based discrimination, there is also a significant risk of lawsuit expenses for employers. Unemployment levels caused by racial discrimination in the workplace might jeopardise an individual's social integration into the Australian workplace, decreasing social group cohesion (Berman, 2008). Underemployment also has been linked to mental health outcome issues (Dooley, 2003; Dooley & Catalano, 2003; Friedland & Price, 2003). Skilled immigrants respond to underemployment by leveraging their immigrant identity by working as instructors, interpreters, case workers, or advisers for other immigrants (Liversage, 2009). These roles, however, may be totally unrelated or mismatched to their credentials. Others may seek assistance from their ethnic community as they establish social networks (Zikic et al., 2010). Some may succeed, while others may become engaged in their immigrant communities failing to assimilate. Some people return to studies to address problems such as qualification devaluation and weak English skills (Chiswick et al., 2005; Zikic et al., 2010). When they are unable to reach their desired levels of success at work, some may opt to focus on other aspects of their lives, such as family satisfaction (Zikic et al., 2010). Finally, immigrants may choose to return to their home country (Liversage, 2009).

Problems with employment are likely to have a detrimental influence on self-concept. The socioeconomic standing of an individual in society may be an important contributor to self-concept. Status is defined as '… perceptions that individuals make about one another as well as their qualities, such as knowledge, employment, and status'. Social status is the value individuals put on one another as respectable fellow humans (Hunter, 1981, pp. 99–100). According to Hayes and Nutman (1981), practically all findings of underemployment found a link between underemployment and a poor self-concept. Underemployment, which results from an immigrant's failure to work at the level at which they have been educated, can also cause significant danger to their mental health (Beiser, 1993). Skilled immigrants who are admitted to a country based on their credentials, training, and abilities may be more vulnerable to losing their sense of self-worth when faced with challenges in obtaining work commensurate with their qualifications (Naidoo, 1992).

There has been a growing interest in the causes of employee stress among immigrant professionals (Parkes, 1986). Employees who are a minority, according to Moritsugu and Stanley (1983), suffer particular stresses. 'Race-related anxiety is an inevitable reality for minority professionals who work in predominantly White workplaces', writes Ford (1985, p. 288). Minority or out-group status, as

well as prejudice and challenges such as accent, skin colour, English-speaking abilities, and foreign credentials, are all significant stressors (Azuh, 1998). These could lead to subtle kinds of prejudice and animosity, which can put an immigrant employee under strain (Essed, 1991).

The primary purpose of this book is to give evidence-based knowledge and insight into how minority professionals perform in predominantly 'White' workplaces. Several stresses related to immigrant Indian professionals' ethnocultural identity have been explored. Predictably, when employees are emotionally exhausted and regard themself to be a misfit or 'outsider', their ability to perform declines (Ozcelik, 2013). Unemployment and underemployment cause mental and emotional stress for skilled immigrants, including feelings of unfulfilment and undervaluation and potential discrimination. These have significant mental health repercussions, culminating in worry and alienation; emotionally leading in despair and feelings of displacement; loss of identity; and anxiety, resulting in weariness, anxiety attacks, and detachment.

Employees' attitudes related to job performance, output, and engagement are influenced by how they view the organisational environment, according to Brown and Leigh (1996). When workers recognise their beliefs and self-interest are valued in the workplace, they align their own goals with the company's and put more effort into the job. This book provides strong evidence that offering support networks to immigrants along with respect and appreciation are important to foster organisational commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour. Professionals migrate largely to improve themselves and their family, as well as advance in their jobs and earn more money. Failure to do so might result in a charged or loaded situation. For today's organisations in increasingly culturally diverse countries like Australia, this is a serious problem.

There is also an urgent need to recognise the emotional labour that different cultural and ethnic groups face at work. Emotional labour may be defined as 'the effort, planning, and control needed to express organisationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions' (Morris & Feldman, 1996, p. 987). Negative emotional labour is associated with job-related pressures rather than key factors of individual job experiences such as enabling networks, integration challenges, cultural norms, and even the acculturative stress process (Pasca & Wagner, 2011). A favourable organisational environment, on the contrary, might contribute to a better sense of self-worth and fulfilment. After coming to Australia, many immigrant professionals have their past learning and job experience discounted and derided (Bertone, 2008). Misconceptions about diversity frequently contribute to the assumption that the expertise of immigrant professionals, particularly those from developing countries, is insufficient and substandard and so inadequate.

Since key industry sectors in Australia have demonstrated a significant need for skilled immigrants, it is not wrong to claim that immigrants are a vital element of an increasing number of labour markets, and their inclusion and assimilation is pivotal to the survival of those sectors. Acknowledging immigrant involvement is critical, especially at work, as weak workplace integration has a detrimental influence on emotional labour. It can lead to dissatisfaction, poorer

job performance, worry, low morale, and dissatisfaction (Mirchandani, 2003). Systemic discrimination and the devaluing of skilled immigrants are typical in nations such as the United States, Australia, and United Kingdom. According to Lamontagne (2003), the skilled immigrant is drawn to Western countries by prospects of a comfortable life and a career, however upon arrival confront often unprecedented difficulties. Some of the respondents in this book also mentioned barriers to effective employment in their field of knowledge owing to regulatory authorities' judgement, a lack of local Australian experience, and perceived cultural differences. As a result, there is a substantial group of highly experienced and knowledgeable immigrant professionals in Australia who are unemployed or underemployed. According to Gee and DeCastro (2001), such immigrant communities may require more emotional management since the social environment can influence emotions at work (Morris & Feldman, 1996).

The workforce's demographic structure is evolving in Australia and organisations are increasingly supporting cultural pluralism. Diversity must be embraced to tackle emerging issues such as competitiveness, talent shortages, global labour force pressure, and an ageing of the population (Berman, 2008). Evidence suggests that racial, ethnocultural, and religious diversity can nurture creativity, boost employee motivation and performance levels, improve profitability, and strengthen consumer and client satisfaction (Paradies et al., 2009; Roberson & Kulik, 2007). Throughout all kinds of industry, the Australian workplace continues to become more ethnically diverse, with people from ethnic origins making up a major percentage of the workforce.

Many allegations of discrimination against Indian immigrants or marginalisation based on accent, colour, or ethnic background are based on anecdotal evidence. Interviews with immigrant Indian professionals suggest that there are various strategies to manage this. Some try to adapt culturally, some leave the organisation, others pursue higher educational and professional credentials, and yet others strive for advancement in the workplace. This book highlights the importance for leadership to build an inclusive climate and include a larger number of workers in cross-cultural management policies and practices by documenting how immigrant Indian professionals face perceived prejudice. Skilled immigrant inclusion on recruiting and promotion panels and cultural awareness training for all are measures which may be implemented (D'Netto & Sohal, 1999). These actions have the potential to serve as a preliminary step for informal networking and socialisation as well. Some employers in Australia discount an immigrant's overseas degree and experience. This necessitates raising awareness by gathering information about the immigrant's home country's curriculum and employment practices to remove barriers to employment in their field of knowledge. This also signifies that Australian employers and review agencies should invest more resources in gaining expertise and knowledge in comparative education and work processes.

The first section of this book addresses a range of concerns that fall under the umbrella of inclusive exclusions or discrimination after inclusion (Carbado et al., 2008, p. 95). The second section looks at how immigrant Indian professionals perceive exclusion after inclusion and the difficulty they face in managing

their emotional labour. They reveal that race matters, when it comes to knowing how emotion work is structured and how emotional labour is done in workplace settings. This book will give insights that can help organisations improve the alignment of organisational rhetoric and practice. It is believed that it will stimulate and develop increased knowledge and understanding to better comprehend and support immigrant Indian professionals. As anti-immigration opinions have grown in recent years, the demand for such publications has risen sharply. Students, businesses, and the general public will get a deeper understanding of immigration issues and new immigrant perspectives. Books can be a powerful doorway into a topic that is complex and highly personal. They may provide a window into gaining perspective and background knowledge, to strengthen the alignment between organisational discourse and organisational practice and encourage awareness and understanding so that skilled immigrants can be better understood and supported, and a new level of empathy towards the immigrant population in Australia can be achieved.

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