

Faith-Inclusive Leadership in Global Business

Bruce Owen, Equinix, and the Move from Compliance to Strategic Capability

Online resource for Faith and Belief at Work: From Compliance to Capability

Summary

This case study illustrates what Strategic Capability can look like in practice.

In the Faith-and-Belief Maturity Journey, Strategic Capability is the stage at which faith-and-belief practice becomes part of how an organisation leads, governs, develops talent, understands stakeholders and creates long-term value. Religion or belief is no longer treated only as a legal, HR or inclusion issue. It becomes connected to the wider questions Boards already care about: leadership, human capital, trust, resilience, stakeholder understanding, responsible technology and organisational purpose.

Bruce Owen's reflections on faith-inclusive leadership in global business provide a powerful example. Speaking from his experience leading digital infrastructure across Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Owen described a live crisis involving critical national infrastructure, regional security threats, Ramadan, employee safety, customer continuity and high-stakes leadership.

His central message was simple: in global business, faith is already present. The question is whether leaders have the maturity to recognise it, respect it and draw on it wisely.

The business context: crisis, infrastructure and human judgement

Owen began with a crisis.

Tensions in the Middle East had escalated rapidly, and critical national infrastructure across the region had become a target. The data centres his company runs are part of that infrastructure. From that point, he and his team were meeting every morning on crisis calls, receiving intelligence from multiple sources and sometimes reacting by the hour.

Three things came into immediate focus.

First, the safety of people. The company runs 24-hour facilities and had a construction site in the UAE with 600 people building the next data centre. Many of those workers were far from home, and most were Muslim.

Second, customers. The company serves thousands of customers, including banks, governments, hospitals and communication platforms. If the data centres go dark, parts of the region may go dark with them.

Third, leadership nerve. The crisis was unfolding during Ramadan, the holiest month of the Islamic calendar, when many employees were fasting, praying and reflecting.

In that setting, faith was not an abstract inclusion topic. It was part of real-time operational decision-making. Leaders had to consider safety, customer continuity, geopolitical risk, religious observance, fatigue, judgement, trust and moral responsibility.

Owen put the point starkly: the world is not made only of risk matrices and service-level agreements. Nor can the world be paused because employees are fasting, praying or carrying the emotional weight of conflict in their home region.

This is Strategic Capability in action. Faith and belief are not being handled only as occasional requests or calendar issues. They are part of how leaders understand people, risk, resilience and responsible judgement.

From inclusion issue to strategy, resilience and talent

Owen challenged the common assumption that faith inclusion is only an inclusion question. In global business, he argued, it is also a strategy question, a resilience question and a talent question.

He asked when leaders last heard someone in a high-stakes business setting speak openly about what faith, belief or conscience was telling them. His answer was that this happens rarely. That should concern leaders, because when decisions are made under pressure, in crises or in ethical grey zones, leaders are guided not only by training decks or spreadsheets. They are guided by deeper sources of values, character and judgement.

This connects directly to the White Paper's argument that faith and belief are part of the human reality of work. They shape conscience, ethics, family, service, community, meaning and vocation. In Owen's framing, for many people they also shape the deeper architecture of leadership.

For global companies, this cannot be treated as marginal. Owen noted that most of the world identifies with a religious or spiritual tradition, and that in the markets he leads across Europe, the Middle East and Africa, faith is not a private hobby. It is woven into how people understand time, money, family, ethics, conflict and trust.

For Boards and senior leaders, the lesson is clear: to ignore faith and belief in global business is to lead with incomplete information.

Faith traditions as sources of leadership wisdom

One of the strongest parts of Owen's talk was his description of faith and belief traditions as sources of wisdom for business.

He did not present them as competing claims. He presented them as reservoirs of insight into human flourishing, ethical judgement and life with others.

He pointed to:

- Christianity's emphasis on love, including love of the difficult person, as a discipline relevant to performance management, customer escalations and competitor relationships.
- Islam's principle of justice, with implications for fair transactions, balanced relationships and procurement.
- Judaism's principle of repairing the world, with implications for ESG and stewardship.
- Hindu and Dharmic traditions' emphasis on duty, with implications for leadership pipelines and responsibility.
- Buddhism's pairing of compassion with clear sight, with implications for feedback cultures.
- Sikhism's emphasis on selfless service, with implications for leadership as service to others.

- Secular humanism's commitment to human dignity, evidence and individual rights.

The point was not that a business should adopt any one tradition. The point was that organisations already employ people drawing on these moral and philosophical resources every day, usually silently.

Strategic Capability means building the maturity to recognise that these sources can contribute to ethical culture, leadership development, trust, stakeholder understanding and long-term value.

Building guardrails: invite, learn, respect

Owen was equally clear about risk.

Faith can be used badly. It can be weaponised. It can exclude, coerce, divide or import external conflicts into the workplace. For that reason, he argued, organisations that invite faith into workplace life must also build guardrails.

He described Equinix's Faith Connect employee resource group as open to any faith, non-faith and worldview. It has no doctrinal test, no membership card and no insider language. It is built on three commitments:

Invite. Learn. Respect.

Invite means welcoming people into practices and observances, such as Christmas, Ramadan iftar, Diwali, Yom Kippur or a moment of secular reflection on Human Rights Day.

Learn means coming together not to agree or convert, but to understand. Assumption, he argued, is where much workforce conflict around belief begins.

Respect means protecting the freedom of every person, including the freedom not to believe, to question or to change one's mind.

For the White Paper, this is a practical example of moving from Culture to Strategic Capability. Faith Connect is not merely a support group or a celebration calendar. It provides a structured way to build religious literacy, trust across difference and maturity around difficult questions.

Back to the crisis room: when faith becomes business capability

Owen returned to the crisis room in the Middle East.

During Ramadan, leaders were making decisions about the construction site, employee safety and customer continuity in the middle of acute geopolitical tension. They were not making those decisions through risk modelling alone.

He described watching Muslim colleagues fast through daylight hours while making decisions of enormous consequence, with live intelligence streaming in about threats in the region they call home. They showed up with resolve, steadfastness, patience and care for one another.

He also described Jewish colleagues in London facing antisemitic attacks in their neighbourhoods, yet continuing to serve global colleagues and customers.

This was not sentimental. It was operational.

The data centres stayed up. The construction site stayed safe. Customers were served. Employees went home to their families.

Owen's conclusion was that this is not a distraction from business. It is business.

That is the heart of Strategic Capability. Faith and belief are not treated as separate from performance, resilience or leadership. They are recognised as part of the human foundations that make performance, resilience and leadership possible.

What this case shows about Strategic Capability

This case illustrates at least seven markers of Strategic Capability.

1. Faith and belief are connected to leadership judgement

Owen's example shows faith and belief shaping how leaders think under pressure, especially when the spreadsheets run out of answers. This aligns with the White Paper's argument that organisations need human judgement, conscience and trust as technology and complexity increase.

2. Faith and belief are connected to global operations

The crisis involved data centres, government intelligence, regional conflict, 24-hour facilities, construction workers, customers and critical infrastructure. Faith was present because people were present, and because global operations take place in societies where religion shapes time, trust, obligation and community.

3. Faith and belief are connected to employee safety and wellbeing

Hundreds of workers were fasting during Ramadan while operating in a heightened risk environment. Leaders had to understand the practical and human realities of observance, fatigue, resilience and care.

4. Faith and belief are connected to customer and stakeholder trust

The company's customers included banks, governments, hospitals and communication platforms. Keeping infrastructure operating was a matter of public trust as well as business continuity.

5. Faith-and-belief networks provide more than belonging

Faith Connect demonstrates how an employee resource group can build religious literacy, interfaith trust, non-faith inclusion and respectful dialogue. It is an example of employee voice becoming organisational capability.

6. Guardrails matter

Owen's "invite, learn, respect" framework recognises both the value and the risk of faith at work. It avoids coercion, insider language and exclusion by making freedom, learning and respect central.

7. Senior leaders set the temperature

Owen's challenge to executives was clear: leaders do not need to share another person's faith to protect that person's right to bring it. Silence from senior leaders creates organisational silence. Sponsorship, presence and questions from leadership create permission and trust.

Board implications

For Boards, this case raises several practical questions:

- Leadership: Are senior leaders equipped to recognise when faith, belief or conscience may shape judgement, resilience and decision-making?
- Crisis governance: Do crisis-management processes consider the human realities of faith, belief, observance, grief, fear, conflict and community obligation?
- Employee voice: Are faith-and-belief employee networks treated only as inclusion groups, or are they also sources of cultural insight, trust and organisational learning?
- Global operations: Do leaders understand how religion or belief shapes time, family, ethics, conflict, trust and stakeholder expectations in key markets?
- Guardrails: Does the organisation have clear principles that make faith inclusion open, voluntary, respectful and inclusive of people of all faiths and none?

- Talent: Are employees encouraged to bring judgement, conscience, character and moral courage into leadership, without being pressured to disclose or perform identity?
- Measurement: Is faith-and-belief practice visible in Board reporting, human capital review, REDI benchmarking or culture measurement?

Practical leadership lessons

This case suggests five practical lessons for senior leaders.

1. Ask better questions

A simple leadership question can open space for maturity: What does faith inclusion look like for us?

2. Sponsor without controlling

Senior leaders do not need to share every tradition represented in the workforce. They do need to protect the conditions in which people of all faiths and none can contribute with dignity.

3. Build inclusive structures

Faith-and-belief work should not depend only on informal goodwill. Structures such as employee networks, clear principles, visible sponsorship and reporting routes help make practice reliable.

4. Keep guardrails clear

Healthy faith inclusion requires openness, non-coercion, freedom of belief and non-belief, respect, and clear standards of conduct.

5. Connect faith inclusion to business reality

Faith and belief may matter in crisis rooms, customer relationships, global markets, leadership pipelines, wellbeing, stakeholder trust and responsible decision-making. Mature organisations learn how to see those connections.

Why this belongs with the White Paper

Faith and Belief at Work: From Compliance to Capability argues that faith-friendly workplaces are not a niche concern. They are one practical test of whether organisations are becoming more human as they become more technologically powerful.

Bruce Owen's example shows what that means in practice.

In this case, faith and belief are not peripheral. They are present in crisis response, global infrastructure, employee safety, customer continuity, leadership judgement, interfaith trust and organisational resilience.

This is Strategic Capability: faith and belief integrated into how an organisation leads, governs, develops trust, understands stakeholders and creates long-term value.

Pull quote options

"Faith is present not as a policy, not as a decoration, but as a principle."

"Invite. Learn. Respect."

"Respect is the load-bearing wall."

"This is not a distraction from business. It is business."

Suggested online framing

Resource type	Case study
Related White Paper section	Chapter 6, From Compliance to Capability; Chapter 8, 12-Month Roadmap; Chapter 9, Measuring Progress
Maturity stage illustrated	Strategic Capability
Key themes	Leadership; crisis management; global operations; faith-and-belief employee networks; Ramadan; stakeholder trust; employee safety; interfaith learning; Board governance
Primary audience	Boards; CEOs; CHROs; General Counsel; faith-and-belief ERG sponsors; global operations leaders; crisis management teams; responsible business leaders

Source note

This case study is based on Bruce Owen's talk, Faith-Inclusive Leadership in Global Business, and the framework developed in Brian J. Grim, RFBF and Faith@Work UK, Faith and Belief at Work: From Compliance to Capability, London 2026.