# Effects of Religiosity, Spirituality, and Personal Values on Employee Performance: A Conceptual Analysis

**AAhad M. Osman-Gani, Junaidah Hashim, Yusof Ismail**
*IIUM University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*
*E-mail: aosmangani@gmail.com*

**Abstract:**

*This paper presents a conceptual analysis of the effects of religiosity, spirituality, individual values on employee performance in organizations while it highlights the moderating and mediating effects of individual values and organizational commitment. This paper developed some propositions that could be tested through empirical research in future. Based on a conceptual framework that is presented to guide future research, the implications for professional practice are discussed.*

**Introduction:**

Extensive literature suggests the significant effects of religiosity and spirituality on people's lives. Religion and spirituality are evident and persuasive in the ethical attitudes, moral reasoning, and management behavior of many managers (Hutson, 2000; King, 2007). Religious beliefs could significantly effect and guide decision making and behavior. According to Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003), religion is based on faith, therefore is not subjected to the rigorous proof necessary for scientific study. They contend that workplace spirituality based on religion is ill-defined and un-testable and therefore cannot contribute to a scientific body of knowledge. Koenig et al. (2000, p. 18) defined religiosity and spirituality:

*"Religion is an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols designed (a) to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality), and (b) to foster an understanding of one's relation and responsibility to others in living together in a community. Spirituality is the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of community"*.

Azimi, et al. (2006) claimed that the religiosity from the Islamic perspective is measurable, but one's true religiosity level is known only to Allah. An empirical study initiated by Mitroff and Denton (1999) that examined religiosity and spirituality in the workplace revealed that all participants believed in a higher power or God, and half agreed they felt that power while at work. Executives rarely prayed or meditated in the workplace. Spirituality, spiritual practices, and spiritual values, have been noticeably absent as variables in organizational research, yet they may be among the most powerful variables related to personal, team, and organizational effectiveness (Heermann, 1997). Previous studies had some limitations that offered future research to reveal how religiosity, spirituality, personal values and commitment affect employees' performance.

At present, research that directly linked the concepts of religiosity, spirituality, commitment and personal values towards performance is lacking. Thus, the present research aims to provide empirical findings on the effect of religiosity, spirituality and personal values,

commitment towards employees' performance across four main religions; Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

It is hypothesized that employees religiosity, spirituality, values, commitment are significant predictors of employees' performance. Although employees' performance is crucial for most of the firms, it has received diminutive attention from researchers under the perspective of employees 'religiosity, spirituality, personal values'. The current research use in-depth literature research to explore their relationship for the intention to develop a conceptual framework.

**Review of Literature**

*Religiosity*

Weaver and Agle (2002) indicated that religious role expectations, internalized as a religious self identity, can influence ethical behavior or values of individual. Religious and spiritual symbols and practices are becoming prevalent and acceptable in the workplace as seen by the increase in enrichment and empowerment programs, prayer meetings, Bible study, religious/spiritual language, and requests for time off for religious obligations or holidays (Mitroff and Denton 1999; Laabs 1995; Gallup et.al. 2000; Digh, 1998; Conlin, 1999; Garcia-Zamor ;2003). Researchers agreed that an individual's religious orientation had a significant impact on personal attitudes and behaviors. It was found that intrinsic religious orientation has a significant positive correlation with emotional intelligence, but extrinsic religious orientation has a negative correlation with emotional intelligence (Liu, 2010). Previous researches elaborated the fact that religion and spirituality is not identical (King, 2007).

Ferm (1963) contended that an acceptable definition of religion refers to "a set of behaviors or meanings which are connected to the action of a religious person" (p. 647). According to Al-Goaib (2003), in Islam, religiosity is the commitment to the fundamentals of Islamic religion empirically and theoretically through the fulfillment of Allah rights, the protection of others rights, following Allah's orders, avoiding bad acts, and performing worship. Individuals characterized as religious are not only those who hold particular religious beliefs but also practice them in day-to-day life (Morgan and Lawton, 1996). It is suggested that people who hold and follow certain religious dogmas will exhibit particular sets of behaviors that are reflected in their personal and social lives. It is thus likely that employees' work behavior will also be affected by their religious preferences to the extent to which they identify themselves with and are active followers of a certain religion (Ntalianis and Darr 2005).

Ntalianis and Darr (2005) explored that younger individuals (part time employees) tend to be less religious than older people. Part-time student employees are more likely to exhibit characteristics of an economic, limited-term exchange relationship with their employer, compared to non-student part-time employees who are likely to maintain such a status over a longer period of their career because of other obligations such as health conditions, consultant nature of work, or child/dependent care responsibilities. Barhem et al. (2009) examined the relationship between religiosity and the feeling of work stress, as represented by Muslim attitudes towards religiosity. The majority of respondents reported a low level of faith. Muslim females were identified to experience more work stress than males. The gender by religion interaction showed that Christian respondents and Muslim females documented less

''traditionally demarcated'' gender roles in social and public domains than Muslim males. Correlation results showed that religiosity was associated with traditional gender roles.

Sawyerr et.al. (2005) investigated how an individual's value structure influences his/her attitudes toward others who were dissimilar and the moderating effects of age, gender, race, and religiosity on this relationship. Results indicated that the impact that a person's values have on his/her attitudes towards diversity is moderated by his/her age, race, and gender. Jayasinghe and Soobaroyen (2007) explored that the accountability systems and religious activities both were influenced by the "structural elements" of trust, aspirations, patronage and loyalty, social status, power and rivalries. Their findings implied that the religious "spirit" is an integral and important part of accountability in non-Western societies. Their structural elements are being influenced by the "religion" and the historically constructed "religious spirit" of their people. The religiosity among Buddhist and Hindu people in our study is dominated by the high religious "spirit" to engage in "actions".

Adams (2008) had shown a positive correlation between prayer and motivation. Oler (2004) examined the extent to which religiosity and spirituality affected daily work practices and leader/follower trust levels in foodservice and nutrition directors and their subordinates. The more directors and employees attended worship services, the more likely they were to demonstrate specific spiritual actions and attitudes at work. Bloodgood et al. (2008) indicated that students who attended worship services more frequently were less likely to cheat than those who attended worship services less frequently. Students who were highly religious were unlikely to cheat whether or not they had taken a business ethics course, students who were not highly

religious demonstrated less cheating if they had taken a business ethics course. Individuals who were highly intelligent displayed significantly less cheating if they were highly religious.

Vasconcelos (2009) indicated that religion is a pervasive subject that – through its tenets – tends to influence somewhat employees' behaviors, perceptions, and decisions of individual's. McCarty (2007) and Biberman and Tischler (2008) noted the growing number of media reports pointing out the incorporation of prayer practices, among other spiritual tools, in workplaces by small-business owners, executives, and rank-and-file employees all asking for God's help. McCarty (2007) also remarked that the participants had reported very interesting results from these prayer meetings, such as increased employee morale and productivity, and decreased employee turnover.

The current study aims to provide more insight into the employees' performance under the perspective of religiosity in the organization. The following propositions have been developed referring to the conceptual framework presented later:

**P1: Religiosity plays a significant role on employee performance when personal values play moderating role.**

**P2: Religiosity has effects on employee performances, when organizational commitment plays a mediating role**

*Spirituality*

Bruce (2000) surveyed members of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) regarding their views about spirituality in the workplace and found that 70% of members defined themselves as spiritual, nearly 60% of respondents felt that their career choice, that of public

service, was a spiritual calling, 56% did not believe it was "appropriate to talk about spirituality" in the workplace. Neck and Milliman (1994) defined spirituality in business organizations and suggested how it can affect employee and organizational performance. They discussed how a new leadership theory, thought self-leadership (TSL), can assist employees in influencing or leading themselves towards experiencing more spirituality in their work. They argued that spirituality involves an individual's search to fulfill their potential for greater meaning and life purpose in their work, alongside a strong sense of community and need to contribute to the betterment of society. The goal of spirituality is typically to reach a highly evolved personal state or attainment of one's highest potential, which in turn can lead to greater employee creativity, motivation, and organizational commitment. Long and Mills (2010) argued workplace spirituality as necessary for organizations and the individuals who work in them to prosper.

Mohamed et al. (2004) reflected that management field and organizations may pay a heavy price for its oversight of spirituality. First, the frustration of spiritually hungry employees with their non-spiritual or anti-spiritual workplace will increase, as organizations that do allow for spirituality may develop a competitive advantage over their rivals. Second, management theories and models that ignore the spiritual dimension will remain incomplete or incorrect. Khanifar et. al. (2010) revealed a significant relationship between spirituality in work place and professional commitment, and, managers should help the members of their organizations to figure how efficient they are for their organizations to reach determined goals.

McGhee and Grant (2008) explained the link between individual spirituality and ethical behavior in the workplace. The authors believed that Aristotelian virtue is the mediating factor between spirituality and moral conduct in business. They contended that spirituality forms an

internalized general regulative ideal, based on four common aspects of spirituality: self-transcendence, interconnectedness, meaning and one's ultimate concern, that governs what individuals perceive and value and how they act. These moral values practiced over time become virtues. Spiritually virtuous individuals contribute significant benefits to organizations. Harrington et al. (2001) suggested that the more congruent employees' values and spiritual aspirations are with the organization, the greater the possibility that employees will find true meaning at work. Spirituality and its components must be understood with greater precision to allow businesses to adopt policies and programs that energize the spiritual nature of their employees.

Karakas (2009) reviewed about 140 articles on workplace spirituality and introduced three different perspectives on how spirituality benefits employees and supports organizational performance: (a) Spirituality enhances employee well-being and quality of life; (b) Spirituality provides employees a sense of purpose and meaning at work; (c) Spirituality provides employees a sense of interconnectedness and community. Fry and Matherly (2006) identified spiritual leadership theory (SLT) as a causal theory for organizational transformation designed to create an intrinsically motivated, learning organization. They argued that employee commitment may be a universal performance dimension in all strategic scorecards and its generalizability along with the proposition that spiritual leadership is a major driver should be investigated in future research.

Spirituality can lead individuals to experience consciousness at a deeper level, thereby enhancing their intuitive abilities (Vaughan, 1989). Nur (2003) found that self-described Christian companies exhibited higher level of satisfaction. East (2005) found a strong and

significant relationship between workplace spirituality and a person's job satisfaction. Polley et al. (2005) debated that despite the intrinsic human benefit and potential organizational benefit of spirituality, spirituality at work was subject to dilemmas, costs, and outright negative effects. He identified several issues such as net economic cost of implementation, potential for worker exploitation, potential for competitive disadvantages, and escalating groupthink.

Evidence indicated that managers are grasping that prayer can be a source of accuracy or a lesser margin of error in their corporate decision making (Cavanagh and Hazen, 2008; Vasconcelos, 2009). McGee and Delbecq (2003) asserted that executives regard prayer as being beneficial to them because it helps them to keep their mental and emotional capacities at an optimal level, and they feel somehow inspired to make right decisions.

The following propositions are presented for future studies:

**P3: Spirituality plays an important role on employee performance, when personal values play moderating role**

**P4: Spirituality plays a major role on employee performance, when organizational commitment plays mediating role.**

*Personal Values*

Smith and Schwartz (1997) defined values as beliefs that refer to desirable goals, transcend specific actions or situations, serve as standards to guide the selection or evaluation of behavior, people and events, and are ordered by importance relative to one another. Work can be a potential source of meaning for people. Important sources of personal meaning are values and

standards (Klerk, 2005; Markow, et al. 2005). Individual morals and convictions are a strong source of values, and these often help to interpret life in a meaningful way.

By themselves values are virtually incoherent; hence they require a context of meaning or rationale. When a number of values about reality are agreed upon stable society, the sum total of shared beliefs and values is called value orientation that is they are solution s adopted by people to questions of ultimate meaning. As such they are invested with sacredness and are seen as unchallengeable.

Rokeach (1968) asserted that values have strong motivational components, as well as cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. Hayajneh and Raggad (1994) supported that personal values determine managers' behavior. Other investigators found a relationship between personal values and behavioral variables such as individual motivation, organizational commitment, managerial success, organizational effectiveness, and the decision making process. Being a Muslim country, the government of Malaysia is implementing an Islamization process to infuse Islamic values throughout the society. The Prime Minister wants Malaysians to take pride in their cultural heritage and adopt values and attitudes, which reveal the best behavior in them. A good Muslim businessman should be guided by God's commandments and his conscience as a human being to execute legal actions towards others (Hashim, 2009). Many scholars argue that it is possible to adopt the outward form of religious behavior without developing a relation with God, sometimes referred to as an extrinsic orientation to religion (Allport and Ross, 1967).

Jaw et al. (2007) investigated the detailed relationships between Chinese cultural values Confucian dynamism, individualism, masculinity, and power distance) and work values (self-enhancement, contribution to society, rewards and stability, openness to change, and power and

status) in an integrated model. The sample was collected from China (selected from after-work classes for Chinese businessmen in China) and Australia (overseas Chinese living or working in Sydney) by questionnaires. The study not only confirms the impact of cultural values on work values, but also brings some new thoughts on Hoftstede's belief that instead of high masculinity and individualism, Confucian dynamism is the main cultural value to foster self-enhancement and most work value of Chinese employees.

Lazar (2010) examined the relationship between spirituality and hospital nurses' work satisfaction and to determine the unique contributions of various specific aspects of spirituality to their work satisfaction. Correlation analysis indicated a positive relationship between life coherency aspects of spirituality and spiritual values with job satisfaction.

King and Crowther's (2004) opined that religiosity and spirituality had beneficial influences and affects on workers' attitudes and behaviors, and on the organizations that employs them. King (2008) suggested, it is an appropriate time for the management field to be employing expertise in exploring the convergence between religion and work. Based on the literature review the fourth proposition can be drawn as

**P4: Employee personal values in organization have significant influence towards his/her performance.**

*Commitment*

According to Argyris (1998), commitment is about generating human energy and activating the human mind. Without it, the implementation of any new initiative or idea would be compromised. Warsi et al. (2009) analyzed the relationship between work motivation, overall job

satisfaction and organizational commitment among Pakistani workforce. Results showed positive and significant relationship exists between work motivation, overall job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Ugboro (2006) determined the relationship between job redesign, employee empowerment and intent to quit measured by affective organizational commitment among survivors of organizational restructuring and downsizing. The results showed statistically significant positive relationships between job redesign, empowerment and affective commitment.

The brief multidimensional measure of religion and spirituality (BMRS= Brief multi-dimensional measure of religion and spirituality) was developed to measure key dimensions of religiosity and spirituality as it relates to physical and mental health outcomes (Fetzer Institute, 1999). Among the subscales the major items was: daily spiritual experiences, values, private religious practices, religious/spiritual coping, religious support, religious/spiritual history, commitment, organizational religiousness, and religious preference.

Organizational commitment has an important role in the study of organizational behavior, partly due to the numerous works that have found relationships between organizational commitment and attitudes and behaviors in the workplace (Porter et al., 1976; Koch and Steers, 1978; Angle and Perry, 1981). Batemen and Strasser (1984) stated that the reasons for studying organizational commitment are related to "(a) employee behaviors and performance effectiveness (b) attitudinal, affective, and cognitive constructs such as job satisfaction (c) characteristics of the employee's job and role, such as responsibility and (d) personal characteristics of the employee such as age, job tenure" (p. 95-96).

*Performance:*

Sarmiento et al. (2007) argued that job performance is often the result of at least two aspects: the abilities and skills (natural or acquired) that an employee possesses, and his/her motivation to use them in order to perform a better job. Many practitioners and academics endorsed the view that employees innovation help to attain organizational success (Axtell et al., 2000; Smith, 2002; Unsworth and Parker, 2003). Vasconcelos (2009) argued that executives as employees in the organization are challenged every day to make important decisions that affect the performance of their business enterprises and, as a result, the success of their own careers.

Cunningham, G.B. (2010) examined the influence of religious dissimilarity and religious personal identity on one's job satisfaction. Structural equation modeling indicated that religious dissimilarity positively affected perceived value dissimilarity from others, which held a negative association with job satisfaction. These effects were qualified, however, by a significant religious dissimilarity × religious personal identity interaction such that, for persons whose religious beliefs were a central part of who they were, being religiously different from others in the workplace strongly impacted their perceived value dissimilarity. Da Silva and Siqueira (2010) pointed to what extent spirituality can contribute, to a deeper understanding of the work activity and how pleasant it can be. They also revealed the motives which may explain a tendency to deny the bonds between spirituality, religiosity and religion within organizational context.

Organization-focused research has shown a growing interest in religiosity and spirituality over the past decade. Organizational scholars had been slow to incorporate religiosity and spirituality into their research; psychologists have a history significant enough to have spawned a specialty area, the psychology of religion (King and Crowther, 2004). Psychologists have explored the influence of religiosity and spirituality on coping (Pargament, 1997). Other areas of

exploration include the parameters and implications of spirituality and religiosity in clinical practice (Kelly, 1995), forgiveness (McCullough and Worthington, 1994), cultural variation in religious and spiritual practices (Armstrong and Crowther, 2002), religion, spirituality, and aging (Crowther et al., 2002) and faith and health (Plante and Sherman, 2001). Human resource management (HRM) is a vital function performed in organizations that facilitates the most effective use of people to achieve organizational and individual goals (Hashim, 2009). Performance appraisal is a formal system of setting work standards, assessing performance, and providing feedback to employees for the purpose of motivation, development and persistence of their performance (Dessler, 2008).

Ali (2005) explained that performance appraisal in Islam is based on normative instructions and the practice of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) and his immediate four Caliphs. The normative realm is revealed in Quranic instructions. It is grouped into three categories: contractual arrangement, self-responsibility and control, and the Almighty's assessment of performance. Ali (2005) further elaborated that the Qur'an clarifies that what one does is solely his or her responsibility and no one should be held responsible for the mistakes of others. Employees are expected to have a moral duty to monitor their own performance and work for self-development. Ali (2005) said there is a common understanding and religious edict that firing employees may constitute a violation of spiritual guidelines and commitment to the community. In addition, some managers are in a dilemma to be merciful, kind and forgiving and they have to consider the actual intention of the poor performers.

**Conceptual Framework:**

Based on past literature review, this research concentrates on conceptual framework of employees' performance. This framework emphasizes those variables like religiosity, spirituality, values, commitment. These independent variables are positively related to the employees' performance in an organization. The diagram framework is given below:
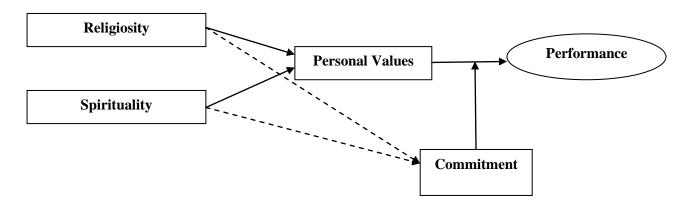


**Figure 1.1: Proposed Conceptual Framework of this study**

**Conclusion:**

It is a misnomer that religiosity and spirituality benefit only society or the community. This conceptual paper outlined the crucial effects of employees' religiosity, spirituality, personal values and commitment towards employee performance. There are several implications for managers and supervisors who attempt to produce changes in employee behaviors in the organization. We recommend that while top management should provide a framework by formalizing religious and spiritual practices, some programs should be organized to enhance organizational values and commitment which are important for employee performance.

It is noteworthy that these factors are dynamic in nature and the relationships between them continuously evolve. The relationship between these major elements must be given careful thought and consideration if employees' performance are desired. These factors do not stand alone; for example, religiosity alone will not lead to significant impact unless the work commitment is present. It is imperative that researchers and practitioners continue to examine ways that employees are motivated to improve the solution. Further research is required to measure the factors proposed in this model and provide a comprehensive framework by identifying all the relevant factors that influence employees' performance.

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