Hierarchical Religion, Employee Religiosity, and Perceptions of Organizational Leadership

Marla Parker
Department of Political Science, California State University – Los Angeles
Affiliate, Center for Organizational Research and Design, Arizona State University

Gabel Taggart
Center for Organizational Research and Design, Arizona State University

Barry Bozeman
Center for Organizational Research and Design, Arizona State University

ABSTRACT

Ours is a study of the relationship between religiosity and perceptions of workplace leaders among employees. Using a regionally representative survey of U.S. full-time employees from for-profit, non-profit, and government sectors, we find that both the hierarchical leadership style of the religions employees adhere to, as well as the personal religiosity of employees, predict how employees view their managers. Results of statistical analysis suggest that employees who report association with hierarchical religions and employees that use religious values when making work decisions have more negative views of leadership in the workplace. However, employees that attend church regularly are more likely to view leadership positively. We discuss explanations of these diverging results.

Keywords:
religion; leadership; employee perceptions
INTRODUCTION

Despite a flurry of papers about a decade ago (Cunningham, 2005; Lowery, 2005; Houston & Cartwright, 2007; King, 2007; Bozeman & Murdock, 2007; Ferguson & Milliman, 2008; Houston, Freeman, & Feldman, 2008; Schley, 2008) and most recently by Freeman and Houston (2010), academic attention regarding religion and public administration has largely been silent in recent years. This is surprising given the myriad of potential linkages between religious attitudes / spirituality and unique features of public service research such as the pro-social ethic (Freeman & Houston, 2010; Perry, 1996; Perry, Brudney, Coursey, & Littlepage, 2008), volunteerism (Ahn, Phillips, Smith, & Ory, 2011), rules, red tape, and formalization (Rosenbloom, Nemrodov, & Barkan, 2004) and race and representative bureaucracy (Krislov, 2012). In this paper we focus on a concept that, although common in all types of organizations, is conspicuous in both religious and public organizations – hierarchy (see Frederickson, Smith, Larimer, & Licari, 2015, p. 136-137). Specifically, we examine the effects that hierarchical religion affiliation and religiosity have on employees’ views towards organizational leaders.

General organization theorists and researchers have long acknowledged that employees’ perspectives on leaders often matter at least as much as leaders’ views of employees (Kochan, et al., 1975; Pulakos and Wexley, 1983; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Employee perspectives have significant implications for key aspects of organizational behavior and human resource management including employee satisfaction, commitment, productivity and performance (Michaelis et al., 2009; Schyns et al., 2008; Jones et al., 1975; Graen et al., 1982). Typically, employees evaluate a leader’s cognitive, skill-based and social attributes such as technical acumen, knowledge, trustworthiness, aptitude, leadership style, ethical behavior, emotional intelligence and relational capabilities (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005; Bommer et al.; 2005 Jones et
Less research examines the role of employees’ value sets in evaluating those attributes, this despite the fact that employees bring these cognitive frames to their assessments of managerial superiors and leaders (Dunegan, 1993).

There are few factors that shape cognitive framing more than one’s fundamental views about religion and moral codes attendant to religions (Ozorak, 2005). This paper contributes to the current understanding of the role of employee value sets in evaluating leadership by examining how religious orientation influences employee’s perceptions of leadership. The workplace has evolved into a place where individuals not only expect to develop professional identities, but also seek both fulfillment of purpose and authentic meaning—often through the application of religious and spiritual principles (Mitroff et al., 1999; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002; Miller, 2006; Sheep, 2006). As such, many employees use value sets rooted in religious and spiritual values to perform in the workplace as well as understand, navigate and interpret various aspects of organizations—including leadership (Aldag & Brief, 1975; Porter, 2004; Hicks, 2003; Ali, 1992). While not often examined, it seems likely that employees who are atheists or otherwise have negative views or affect about religion may have those negative but perhaps highly salient views frame their perceptions managers and leaders (Grant, 1998; McKinney and Moore, 2004).

Although religion and spirituality have overlapping constructs, principles and aims geared towards self-improvement, self-actualization, morality, ethical behavior and connectedness to a greater purpose beyond the ego, distinctions do occur (Zinnbauer et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2000). Generally speaking, religion focuses on observance of a system of beliefs associated with an all-powerful deity expressed through prescribed practices, values and norms unique to an organized sect. Spirituality focuses on the relational aspect between the self and
various forms of a higher power that aims to help an individual realize his her best self, which may or may not involve association with an organized institution (Zinnbauer et al., 1997, 1999; Hill et al., 2000). Many researchers acknowledge differences in how religion and spirituality manifest in the workplace such as how religious affiliation shape workplace decision making rather than goals to exercise purpose (Cash & Gray, 2000; Amin et al., 2004; Hicks, 2002). We find this distinction useful for the presented study because belief systems used as personal heuristics and lenses are significantly influenced by institutionalized norms and values such as religion, rather than the more ephemeral, individualized practice of spirituality.

Employee evaluation of leadership is of particular importance given that leaders ensure the day-to-day function of an organization as well as influence organizational mission, culture, environment, policies and norms. All of these factors can facilitate or hinder an employee’s sense of purpose, which often stems from religious beliefs (Milliman et al., 2003; Lewis & Geory, 2000; Mitroff et al., 1999). Thus, the extent to which an employee assesses or values leadership using religious principles can have significant ramifications for his or her development as an organizational actor (Cacioppe, 2000; Hicks, 2000).

Our primary research question is: “To what extent and in what ways do employees’ religiosity influence their perceptions of their managerial supervisors and organizational superiors? Our theoretical framework uses religious commitment and religious hierarchy as means to understand how religion-induced views on authority may influence views about one’s organizational superiors. Our logic is as follows. First, we expect that religious people will tend to be influenced by religious values and doctrine in many aspects of their lives, not just those aspects pertaining specifically to worship and formal religious activities. Second, since the tenets of many religions emphasize respect for authority (embodied in God, clerics, or both) and, at the
same time, a de-emphasis on personal material or worldly needs, we expect that this orientation and practice of self-abnegation will affect many aspects of life, including the workplace. Third, all else equal, those with strong faith in doctrinaire religions (i.e. most religions prevalent in the United States) will have a more favorable view about their supervisors simply because they have been influenced by religion to accede to authority rather than to be aggressively questioning and critical of authority. We expect to find difference according to religion because some are more unyielding and authority focused than others.

The remainder of our paper is organized as follows. First we provide a brief literature review of the hierarchical aspects of religion and of religious commitment, focusing especially on their possible impacts on perceptions about one’s organizational superiors and supervisors. We provide hypotheses drawn in part from the literature and in part from our own causal reasoning. Next, we describe our data source and analysis method. We provide statistical analysis of the relation of religious variables to perceptions of supervisors, using data from respondents to a questionnaire administered as part of the National Administrative Studies Project-Citizen Edition (NASP-Citizen) project. We then report our findings and report results in connection with our hypotheses. We conclude with a discussion of the practical and theoretical implications of our work.

**BACKGROUND**

The following section addresses research related to key warrants and claims central to our paper, which asserts that several direct and indirect relationships exist between religious hierarchy, religious commitment and perceptions of supervisors. First, we review general literature explaining religious hierarchy and how it influences perceptions of authority. Second, we review religious commitment and how it reinforces principles related to religious hierarchy.
Lastly, we consider how both constructs directly and indirectly perceptions of organizational supervision.

**Religious Hierarchy-and-Organizational Supervisors**

Readings from the sociology of religion generally summarize the psycho-social hierarchy within dominant religious that tend to emphasize submission to authority. This provides our foundation for understanding how religion influences perceptions of authority. According to the theoretical observations from Weber (1963) and Durkheim [as summarized by Pickering (2009) and Hamilton (2001)], the first order of authority in such religions commands faithfulness, submission and loyalty to a ‘higher power’ (i.e. God). Additional theoretical writings from the sociology of religion, social theory and psychology literature emphasize that religious institutions promote the notion that personal fulfillment and achieving social order comes by following and worshiping a higher power (Beckford, 2003; Smith, 1991; Wuthnow, 1998; Yinger, 1957).

Theoretical and practical works describing religious hierarchy further explain that dominant religions view human authority as an outgrowth of divine authority (Asad, 2009; Kriger & Seng, 2005; Strauch, 1985; Maliti, 1997; Barnes, 1978). As such, religious heads and figures act as the representatives of a deity and hence deserve deference and respect. A line of leadership exists dictating requirements for governance, promulgation of teachings and beliefs, and execution of ceremonies within religious institutions (Asad, 2009; DePillis, 1966; Weaver, 1995; Hornsby-Smith, 2009; Shupe et al., 2000; Charry, 1997). Tacit and explicit norms determine the responsibilities of individuals throughout the hierarchy of religious authority, how they are to be treated and to whom one owes deference (Kimball, 2008; Lawton & Morgan, 2007; Marlow, 2002; Byrnes, 1993; Donovan, 1958). Many of the world’s largest religious
institutions (e.g. Islam, Catholicism, Judaism, and many Christian Protestant sects) encourage individuals to pursue divine purpose by focusing less on oneself and overcoming personal challenges by following a higher authority, often including prescribed earthly representatives of that authority (Maliti, 1997). Towards that end, religion encourages achieving personal improvement and success through humility and submission to authorities wiser and more capable than themselves (Emmons, 2005; Yalom, 2002; Schnittker, 2001). Although this perspective may easily be conflated with spirituality, the distinction rests in that religions promulgate specific sets of principles and rules, typically well codified and identified closely with the respective religions.

Empirical research supports the proposition that religious hierarchies have salience to large segments of the U.S. population. Data from national surveys (e.g. General Social Survey) summarized by Association of Religion Data Archives consistently demonstrate that many in the U.S believe in a higher power. Empirical research suggests that following religious text and adherence to religious counsel (i.e. accepting religious authority) result in some personal gains in well-being, including improved relationships, satisfaction with one’s life and even better physical health (Wink & Dillon, 2008; Gill et al., 2010; Ellison, 1991; Worthington et al., 1996).

Research also demonstrates that religious teachings specifically provide expectations, guidelines and instructions for how followers should behave as organizational actors. For example, teachings common across Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism provide specific guidelines directing its followers to be intensely diligent employees who practice seriousness, fairness, good stewardship, honesty, humility and submission to superiors (Furnham, 1984; Weber, 1958; Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008; Arslan, 2001). Additional literature shows these
specific behavioral dimensions and the teachings associated with religion have been shown to significantly influence how employees engage in career and task selection, stress management, and decision making (Horvath, 2015; Prati et al., 2007; Fernando & Jackson, 2006; Mitroff & Mitroff, 1999).

**Religious Commitment**

Religious commitment reflects the degree to which one develops and adheres to principles and values of his or her designated faith (Stark & Glock, 1968; Glock, 1962; Stark & Bainbridge, 1987). Religious commitment requires the use of religious values as the primary lens to evaluate as well as regulate the self and external world. Consistent practices, rituals and worship inculcate the primacy of obedience to the said principles and to the religious figures associated with them.

Religious commitment arguably influences perceptions of those in authority, including in realms not directly related to religion. In many instances and for many believers enacting religious practices and values appears to reinforce their perceptions of connection with a divine power by discouraging the fulfillment of supposedly dangerous, fleeting and shallow needs of the self (Weber, 1993; Yinger, 1957). For many of the religiously committed, humility, obedience and self-abnegation are associated with and perhaps enable the good life and closeness to a deity. Religious practices and routines may reinforce the tendency to diminish oneself in the face of authority, especially for those who are constantly engaged in worship and prayer and who are guided by religious leaders who are viewed as earthly representatives of divine authority (Pickering, 2009). When obedience to authority becomes paramount in one’s life, it seems reasonable to expect that such a reflexive approach to authority, hierarchy and formal principles may well spill over into secular realms.
HYPOTHESES

Our first research question asks: how does religious authority and hierarchy relate to perceptions of work colleagues and supervisors? As individuals have increasingly sought to develop a higher purpose through vocation, the emphasis on religion has gained further traction as a critical dimension of organizational behavior including, but not limited to, leadership (Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Steger et al., 2010). The following describes how religious hierarchy and religious commitment are specifically implicated in perceptions of leadership.

The workplace acts as a critical location for important personal development and manifestation of the higher self (Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2000; Neck & Millman, 1994; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2000; Neck & Millman, 1994; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Principles and practices used in religious spaces commonly find value as heuristics in the workplace. Followers affiliated with religions having strict hierarchies deserving of reverence similarly aggrandize leadership in the workplace (Rice, 1999; Frey & Powell, 2009; Malcomson et al., 2006). Just as religious leaders may enjoy positive perceptions from followers, as employees these followers may likely view workplace leaders as being well-endowed with skill, a strong work ethic, significant knowledge, innovativeness and relational intelligence—often above and beyond the capacity others. In short, we contend that the strength of the religious leadership hierarchy compounds the positive views of leadership in the workplace. Our first hypothesis reflects this view:

H1: There is a statistically significant and positive relationship between employees’ affiliation with religions characterized by strict hierarchies (e.g. Catholicism, Mormonism) and perceptions of the competence of their supervisors.
Our second research question asks: how does religious commitment matter for perceptions of workplace leadership? First, it is worthwhile to understand how religious commitment manifests itself in the workplace. Religiously committed employees utilize religious frameworks to influence how they display their mores and ethics beyond the confines of a church, mosque, temple and the like (Day, 2005; Long & Helms, 2010). Religiously committed employees likely prioritize certain aspects of aspects of organizational life. One key aspect is the degree to which organizational and religious values align (Longenecker et al., 2004; Duffy, 2010). This does not necessarily mean that employees expect secular organizations to adopt and explicitly convey particular religious ideals that specifically reference deities, religious text, ceremonies or other practice unique to a particular faith. Rather, religious commitment encourages employees to assign significance to moral and ethical practices of an organization as they relate to the positive treatment and development of people; service to the community and social causes (e.g. corporate social responsibility); business practices that emphasize the greater good as opposed to greed and sole survival; and good stewardship of organizational resources (Epstein, 2002; Longenecker et al., 2004; Fernando & Jackson, 2006; Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008).

A second aspect of organizational life likely prioritized by the religiously committed is the fostering of spiritual or religious identities. This means that the religiously committed likely esteem organizational cultures that tolerate or allow expression of religious ideals (Hicks, 2000; Wald, 2009; King & Williamson, 2005). In other words, the religiously committed consider how organizations accommodate the merging of professional identities and religious ideals. Thus, religious commitment entails employees using religious value sets to consider their own roles in organizational life. More specifically, they apply such values in determining how their decisions, responsibilities and behavior will contribute to higher sense of self. Ultimately, the religiously
committed employee seeks to be a morally upright, ethical and productive member of the organization that values the greater good and not just appealing to the ego (i.e. prioritizing the survival and success of the individual over the well-being of others) (Mitroff et al., 1999; Delbecq, 1999; Kim et al., 2009; Lynn, 2009; Ali, 1988).

These two aspects of religious commitment facilitate prioritizing leadership and organizational welfare above the self. Thus, the aforementioned leadership qualities likely become even more elevated among employees who frequently engage in religious practices and apply religious values to navigating and evaluating aspects of the workplace (Alston, 1975). Based on this discussion, we present the following hypotheses:

H2: There is a statistically significant and positive association between employees’ attending religious activities regularly and their perceptions of the competence of their supervisors.

H3: There is a statistically significant and positive association between employees’ using religion as a guide for workplace decision making and their perceptions of the competence of their supervisors.

H4: There is a statistically significant and positive association between employees relying on religion in shaping their life choices and their perceptions of the competence of their supervisors.

DATA AND METHODS

Data for this study comes from the National Administrative Studies Project (NASP) Citizen survey. This is the fourth iteration of the well-known NASP surveys focused on
organizational behavior in the public sector, which includes public management practices and
corporate management practices. The latest edition of the survey differs in that it specifically aims
to understand these organizational dimensions in the public, nonprofit and private sectors among
a broad range of citizens including those with unemployed, current, part time, self-employed and
retired working status. Respondents are specifically asked questions regarding their perspectives
on public-private partnerships, willingness to take risks, opinions on innovation, job attainment,
experiences as mentors and mentees, perceptions of red tape in their organization, workplace
behaviors, involvement in social life (volunteering), utilization of social media and technology
in both their organization-life as well as their personal life, volunteering behavior, religious
practices and affiliation and basic demographic information. The survey was administered online
to 4,070 U.S. workers on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk crowdsourcing marketplace, which is a cost
effective crowdsourcing platform that many social scientists are employing to remedy issues with
low response rates and small sample sizes associated with traditional online surveys. The final
dataset included 3,451 completed responses, for a drop-out rate of 15.21%. OLS regression was
used on the subset of 1,479 respondents who reported being full-time employees at the time they
took the survey. The next section describes the independent, dependant and control variables.

Independent Variables

Religious commitment and affiliation with hierarchical religion comprise the two primary
independent variables. As mentioned previously, religious commitment can be measured along
several dimensions: dimensions of frequency of practices, extent of belief in ideology, and
regularity in applying ideologies. Responses to a battery of religiosity questions are used to
operationalize and measure specific aspects of religious commitment, yielding several
dichotomous variables. The survey asked respondents to indicate whether or not (1-yes and 0-
not) religion plays a role in his or her life in several ways, the following responses make comprise our measure of religious commitment: “I regularly (once per week or more) attendance to a church, mosque or synagogue;” “I use my religion as a guide to morality and life choices;” “my religious faith strongly affects my career choices; and my religious faith helps me make specific decisions at work.”

Affiliation with a hierarchical religion is also a dichotomous variable based on a survey question that asked the respondents to indicate their religious preference. They were given the following options: Catholic, Protestant, Christian (but not Protestant), Buddhism, Hinduism, Jewish, Islam, Mormon, other, ‘prefer not to say’ and ‘no religious affiliation’. We created an indicator variable to indicate whether or not (1-yes and 0-no) a respondent indicated a preference for a hierarchical religion. Catholicism, Judaism, Islam and Mormon were designated as hierarchical religions based upon known practices, norms, culture, values and organization reflecting strict boundaries within leadership hierarchy. Typically, these particular religious sects have specifically outlined and designated roles for individuals officially ordained to perform duties within the respective religious institution (Moody, 1953; Kowalewski, 1993; Crones & Hinds, 2003; Bloom, 2002; Quinn, 1994). Also, they typically have very strict and detailed governance systems determining the level of authority each official has in decision-making and organizational management. Moreover, the culture of these religions is generally characterized as prominently displaying the presence of people in official capacities and subsequently encouraging strong deference to them among followers. Comparatively, Protestant, Hinduism and Buddhism sects generally have less elaborate and strict hierarchical structures, meaning individuals selecting these categories were coded as ‘0’ for variable indicating preference for a strong hierarchical religion.
**Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable reflects the respondent’s evaluation of their manager’s competence using the following survey question: ‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your manager/supervisor?’ The statements were based on how the respondent compared himself or herself to his or her manager along the dimensions of intelligence, work ethic, performance, idea generation and risk taking. The statements are measured on Likert scale ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. Responses to these items higher on the Likert scale reflect lower respect for the competence of one’s supervisor. A factor analysis was conducted to see how strongly these elements collectively reflected the construct of leadership perceptions, which yielded one factor and a high Crohnbach’s alpha of .880. Then, the mean of these five dimensions was taken to create a composite index for the final dependent variable¹.

**Control Variables**

We use a number of control variables related to several of the respondent’s individual and workplace demographics including gender, race, age and tenure at employer. Each of these elements could also contribute to how employee perceptions of leadership competence. Women and men can have varying views of leaders, where women tend to have more favorable assessments—especially when comparing themselves to leaders. More specifically, women tend to devalue themselves in comparison to others, which can be compounded when if gender dynamics in an organization promote more masculine leadership traits. This is likely due to women generally devaluing themselves in environments promoting leadership traits viewed as

¹ A single factor variable was also calculated using the five items with no significant differences resulting in the outcomes of the analysis.
more masculine in nature. Social and power dynamics shaped by race can influence how employees view leadership. Employees may consciously or unconsciously rely upon racial stereotypes related to ability and intelligence that characterize non-minority leaders more capable. Moreover, race-based assessments of leadership can vary when the employee’s and leader’s race differ from each other whereby minorities have more favorable views of non-minority leaders. Both age and time at employer are expected to have similar effects on perceptions of leadership whereby older employees and those having spent longer in their organization may view themselves as being just as-if not more-experienced than their leaders. Table 1 summarizes the independent, dependent and control variables of interest.

Figure 1 below provides the model using the previously described variables and illustrating the expected relationships among them, where the plus signs (+) indicate a positive relationship and the minus signs (-) indicates a negative relationship. As Figure 1 illustrates, we expect positive relationships between preference for a hierarchical religion, as well as the three measures of religious commitment, and affirming perceptions of leadership.

Analysis
This section describes the results from the data analysis. First, we provide the descriptive statistics and then estimations from the regression analysis.

**Descriptive Statistics.** Table 2 below provides the descriptive statistics for the variables of interest. Among the sample, slightly over half of the full time employees in the sample (55%) belong to hierarchical religions. However, fewer of them can be characterized as being highly religiously committed. Thirty percent of the sample relies upon a religious faith as a guide for moral and life choices. Even fewer use their religious faith to make decisions at work (13%) and regularly attend a religious institution (12%). The mean of 2.89 for the ‘perception of leader’ variable shows that the full time employees in the sample tend to think of themselves as being just as capable of their managers, which shows that the respondents do not hold extremely positive or critical views of their leaders. Finally, the average age of the respondents is 34 years old. They have spent on average five years at their organizations. Fifty-two percent are women, 10% are underrepresented minorities and 17% work in the public sector.

***************
Insert Table 2 about here
***************

**Regression Estimates.** Table 3 provides the regression estimates. Among the dependent variables, only an employee’s affiliation with religious hierarchy, use of religion for workplace decision making and regular attendance to a religious institution significantly influence his or her perception of leaders. This indicates that values of hierarchical religions and some components of religious commitment matter for how employees navigate and interpret their organizations, particularly leadership. However, these aspects of religion unexpectedly affect perceptions of leadership in both positive and negative ways. In particular, while belonging to a
hierarchical religion and use of religious values for workplace decision making significantly contribute to negative perceptions of leadership \( (p<.10) \), regular attendance to a religious institution results in significantly more favorable views of leadership \( (p<.10) \). An employee’s use of religion as a guide for moral and life and choices appears not to have any significant influence on their perceptions of leadership.

These findings suggest that employees tend to have very specific applications of faith in the workplace, specifically applications that are separate from non-work life. In particular, specific applications are used to assess the value of leadership, particularly vis-à-vis and employee’s own capabilities. However, unexpectedly, mere religious affiliation and use of religious values does not mitigate the ego to the point where leadership is elevated over the self. Rather, it is regular religious practice that tends to do this, indicating that active immersion within a religion and not passive religiosity tends to yield more positive perspectives on leadership. To summarize, H2 is supported while H1, H3 and H4 are not supported. Among the control variables, only gender significantly matters for perceptions of leadership. As expected, women tend to have more favorable views of leadership vis-à-vis their own capabilities \( (p<.05) \).

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This paper sought to understand how religiosity in the form of religious affiliation and religious commitment influenced employee’s perception of their leaders. Overall, we found that these factors certainly do matter, but in unexpected ways. While affiliation to a hierarchical
religion and use of religious faith for workplace decision making results in lower valuations of leadership, more frequent attendance to a religious institution has the opposite effect. This suggests that employees do not necessarily translate the strong lines of authority found in hierarchical religions to the work place; nor do their religious values mitigate the ego. This indicates that the translation of hierarchy and the application of religious values that tend to elevate leadership are more likely to happen if employees actively engage in practices where they experience leadership in action (e.g. attending a religious service led by an official religious authority). Another possible scenario could be that for some people who identify with a hierarchical religion, they do not attend regularly because of less positive views towards strong authority, which also appear in their valuation of supervisors at work. Our findings also must consider a key limitation of the study: the religiosity of the employee’s leader and organization. As mentioned previously, religiously committed employees likely value workplaces that facilitate and accept religious expression and identities. Thus, employees may have less favorable views if they perceive their workplace as not accommodating of religious convictions, not encouraging the development of religious identities or lacking moral and ethical fiber. Unfortunately, this information is not available in the current data set. Future research about the application of religion in the workplace should consider this.

While the unit of analysis in this paper is employees of for-profit, non-profit, and government organizations, we suggest this work is of particular importance to public organizations. Why? The work of Houston and colleagues throughout the years has shown that individuals in public service organizations, especially government organizations, are more spiritual in their attitudes (Houston & Cartwright, 2007) and more religious (Houston, Freeman, & Feldman, 2008) than their counterparts in other sectors, and are more active in their religious
communities than the general public (Freeman & Houston, 2010). Thus, the relationships we find in this paper may be more salient in public organizations by virtue of there being generally higher percentages of religious people in those organizations. This should not be confused with the idea that any religious person in a public organization is more likely to view their leaders positively than any religious person in a private organization, as this idea is not born out in the results of this paper. However, in many ways it is a companion piece to earlier work that examined how public manager’s religious orientation and views shape their work attitudes (Bozeman & Murdock, 2007) with the main differences being that in this case the focus is on the religiosity and work attitudes of employees of all sectors.

What are the practical and theoretical implications of the findings when considering employee’s valuation of leadership, especially vis-à-vis their own capabilities? Managers may want to consider how religiosity can influence employee behavior and important employee outcomes such as cooperation and commitment, both of which can influence performance and output. Additionally, managers should consider how the religiosity of employees can facilitate more participative forms of management that includes and values employee viewpoints. Overall, managers may want to consider how they can leverage common ground with employees based upon religious convictions or identities, similar to how race and gender provide a context for useful leader and follower relationship dynamics. An additional benefit of such practices is that they can facilitate a broader sense of diversity that can contribute to innovation and more effective problem solving. Furthermore, in the current landscape where building cultural competence is important for public organizations, certainly competence with regard to religiosity / spirituality among managers and employees can be another way for the organization to connect to a diverse citizenry.
Theoretically, the findings from this study encourage a more precise study of religiosity in the workplace. In particular, this study illustrates the value of using easily observable religious constructs to understand their influence on specific organizational dimensions. Thus, more robust theories of organizational behavior and religiosity can be developed. In particular, these findings encourage the development of a theory explaining the relationship between religious hierarchies and secular organizational leadership when considering the interactive effects of religious affiliation and other indicators of religiosity.

REFERENCES


### TABLE 1

**Survey Questions, Responses, and Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable and Survey Question</th>
<th>Survey Response</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Leadership –</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you agree</td>
<td>I usually work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or disagree with the following</td>
<td>harder than my manager</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>statements regarding your</td>
<td>I take more risks than my manager</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manager/supervisor?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My ideas are usually better than my manager's ideas</td>
<td>1 - Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am smarter than my manager</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I usually perform at a higher level than my manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Commitment –</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe the role of</td>
<td>I use my religion as a guide to morality and life choices</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religion in your life? Please select all that apply.</td>
<td>My religious faith helps me make specific decisions at work</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I regularly (once per week or more) attend a church, mosque or synagogue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion Hierarchy –</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify your religious preference.</td>
<td>Catholicism, Judaism, Islam and Mormon</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protestant, Hinduism and Buddhism</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender - Are you male or female?</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0 - Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 - Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age – What year were you born?</td>
<td>(open ended)</td>
<td>Current year-response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Tenure –</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many years have you worked at this organization?</td>
<td>(open ended)</td>
<td>Values 1-60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Empirical model describing religious hierarchy, religious commitment, and employee perceptions of leadership

**RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY**
Affiliation with hierarchical religion (+)

**RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT**
Religious faith used to make career choices (+)
Religious faith used to make work decisions (+)
Regular attendance to religious institution (+)

**PERCEPTION OF LEADERSHIP**

**CONTROL VARIABLES**
Gender, Minority Status, Age, Tenure at Organization, Public Sector
### TABLE 2
Summary Statistics for Variables Used in the Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of leader</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion - hierarchical</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion – moral guide for life</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion – help with work decisions</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion – attend church regularly</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>34.20</td>
<td>9.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underrepresented minority</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job tenure with primary employer</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>5.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sector</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 3

**Ordinary Least Squares Regression Output**

**Dependent Variable: Low Perception of Managerial Competence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Ordinary Least Squares</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion - hierarchical</td>
<td>0.138*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.072)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion – moral guide for life</td>
<td>0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.076)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion – help with work decisions</td>
<td>0.190*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.099)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion – attend church regularly</td>
<td>-0.171*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.095)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.182**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.070)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underrepresented minority</td>
<td>0.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job tenure with primary employer</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sector</td>
<td>0.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.095)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.036***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.146)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1,479</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ENDNOTES

1 We would expect different effects of religion among those who are believers in less doctrinaire religions with less hierarchy, such as for example Buddhism or Shintoism.