



RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT AND SERVANT-LEADERSHIP  
*The Development of an Exploratory Conceptual Model*

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Irrespective of one's personal religious beliefs, no objective observer can deny that religion exerts a major influence on society and human resources management. The influence of religious beliefs and spirituality on the job-related attitudes, behaviors, and performance of employees is an often neglected and underresearched topic across the major organizational sectors (Garcia Zamor 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003; King 2007; Exline and Bright 2011; Byrne, Morton, and Dahling 2011). This article strives to develop a conceptual framework for the influence of religious commitment on servant-leader and human resource management work-related outcomes. It will include the main dependent and independent variables as well as the relevant moderator variables. A vital area for model testing is the development of clear conceptual and operational definitions for the complex religious commitment construct. The article will conclude with specific recommendations for future research as well as observations on overcoming obstacles in conducting research on religion in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

The United States manifests the highest level of religious belief of all industrialized nations (Pew Research Center 2003; Garcia-Zamor 2003). Groups fleeing religious persecution settled the United States, and the founding fathers were primarily men of religious and spiritual faith (Wallace 2001). They vigorously debated the constitutional means to best preserve and safeguard religious freedom, including the appropriate balance between



church and state (Bader 1999). These issues are a source of ongoing legal and statutory conflict (Bader 1999). One of the many virtues of our democratic system is that immigrants from a multiplicity of cultures peacefully assimilate and adopt a common core of pluralistic values, and as a result, the United States thus far has not experienced the degree of religious conflict that occurs in some parts of the world (Fox 2000).

The study of religion in the workplace is an unattractive and difficult research area given the sensitive and controversial nature of the subject matter (Garcia-Zamor 2003; Moore 2010). There is a dramatic increase in societal interest in the influence of religion and spirituality, as evidenced by the burgeoning body of prescriptive and descriptive literature from research and practitioner perspectives (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003).

Employees in all sectors face a highly variable environment in terms of receptivity to workplace religious expression (*Regent Business Review* 2003; King 2007). From a legal perspective, public sector employees receive First Amendment free speech protections unavailable to private and non-profit sector workers, and several court decisions extend religious speech protection to public sector employees (*Regent Business Review* 2003). A basic assumption that underlies this research is that irrespective of the organization's formal policies regarding religious expression, the employee's religious beliefs exert an influence on employee cognitive, affective, and behavioral attributes (Knotts 2000).

An employee's religious beliefs influence private as well as public behavior across a variety of settings and mechanisms, especially when religious commitment is high and values internalized (Knotts 2000). For example, in the Judeo Christian religious tradition (and most other religions as well) stealing is a serious offense. An employee with a high level of religious commitment is less likely to engage in workplace theft irrespective of the circumstances and the likelihood of detection. Assimilated religious values exert a profound influence, sometimes reducing the need for formal organizational control policies and surveillance tools, as the most effective means for enforcing adherence to norms is voluntarily compliance (Barzelay and Armajani 1997). This is but one example of the many situations in which religious commitment influences workplace behavior. Another example relates to religion's influence on promoting more efficacious stress-coping strategies generalizing to a wide range of life situations (Graham, Furr, Flowers, and Burke 2001; Johnson 2001; Skrobarcek 1998).



A review of the empirical literature in government, business, and the social sciences found a paucity of research on the direct or indirect influence of religious belief and practice on key workplace attitudes (commitment, job satisfaction), job behaviors (absenteeism, turnover), and work performance (Garcia-Zamor 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003). The vast majority of the published literature is descriptive, prescriptive, or anecdotal in nature. This absence of information is due to three factors: (1) the lack of interest in religion in social science until the mid to late eighties; (2) the sensitivity of the area; and (3) the difficulty in measuring key constructs. None of the reviewed literature provided a comprehensive framework for the relationship between religious commitment and key workplace outcomes. To stimulate research and discussion in this area, a preliminary model of the role of religion is presented in the next section.

A key first conceptual issue is differentiating religion from spirituality. A religion is a formalized and integrated set of beliefs and activities that influences the adherent's thought and action (Corbett 1990; Graham, Furr, Flowers, and Burke 2001). This definition allows for a wide variation of religious practice from traditional monotheistic to animistic and polytheistic religions. Given the amorphous nature of spirituality, many different operational definitions exist in the literature (Mitroff and Denton 1999; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003). Two common central elements are inferring meaning from life experiences and experiencing transcendence (May 1982; Mitroff and Denton 1999; Graham, Furr, Flowers, and Burke 2001). Some definitions of spirituality do not require a belief in a supreme being, as atheists and agnostics experience self transcendence in a variety of forms (Stoll 1989; Graham, Furr, Flowers, and Burke 2001). Research is complicated by the varying degrees of overlap between religious and spiritual practices. For example, a religious employee may seek spiritual meaning in activities outside the confines of traditional religious observations (a Christian employee taking a course in yoga, for example). The focus of this paper is on the influence of organized religious beliefs given that formal religions are the foundational faith system for the United States. Approximately 85 percent of Americans self-identify with a Christian religious denomination, though measures of active practice and participation such as church attendance indicate lower levels of commitment (43 percent of believers attend church, The Barna Group 2004).



## RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT MODEL OVERVIEW

Religious commitment is defined as the intensity of belief and practice associated with an established, formal, and organized faith system (See Figure 1). Consistent with the operational definitions of spirituality, there is no single accepted conceptualization of religious commitment (Mockabee, Monson, and Grant, 2001). The framework employed here is a model that incorporates elements and relationships from a variety of research sources. It functions as a heuristic cognitive map that summarizes schematically the definition of the elements of the multifactor religious commitment construct and the many complex interrelationships between the variables. A model, due to its size and scope, is extremely difficult to field test. Hence, a major goal of this paper is to stimulate discussion and research on the model's individual components.

This conceptual model utilizes a six factor definition of religious commitment, which consists of religious practice (Sim and Low 2003), religious belief systems (Farling, Stone, and Winston 1999; Sendjaya and Sarros 2002; Hodson 2002), religious behavior (Farling, Stone, and Winston 1999; Sendjaya and Sarros 2002; Hodson 2002), religious cognitive states (Houlden 1982), affective states (Harris 2002; Fredrickson 2003), and supernatural religious experiences (Ingersoll-Dayton, Krause, and Morgan 2002). The strength of an employee's religious commitment influences the propensity to practice servant-leadership and four interrelated work behavior orientations (accountability/grace, organizational citizenship, goal-directed achievement, and stress-coping strategies), and these, in turn, are a major factor in determining workplace impacts (Knotts 2000). There are four sets of moderator variables: generalized spirituality (Mitroff and Denton 1999), religious affiliation/denomination (Cohen 2002; Cohen, Siegel, and Rozin 2003), organizational support (Digh 1998; Cash and Grey and Rood 2000; Huang and Kleiner 2001; Atkinson 2000; Starcher 2003), and person-centered characteristics (demographics and health variables) (Xavier 2001; Wink and Dillon 2001; Harris 2002; King, Furrow, and Roth 2002). Each of these factors is addressed in more detail later in the article.

The general hypothesis is a positive correlation between the intensity of religious commitment and the internalization of servant-leadership values and behavior. The direction of the impact is partially determined by a match between the employee's religious beliefs and his or her congruence with organizational culture. Another fundamental assumption of this model is

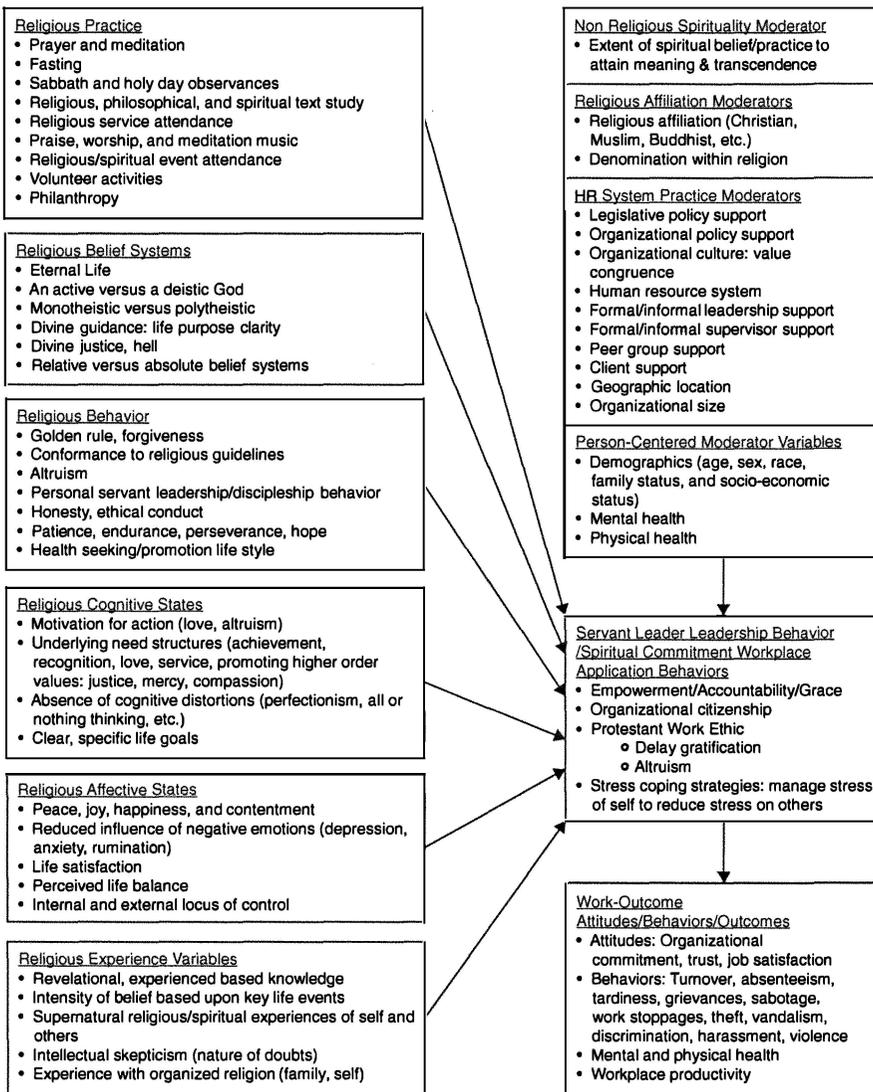


Figure 1. Religious Commitment Model

the triune nature of life balance: the health of the physical body, the well-being of the mind, and an eternal soul (Mijares 2003). Most formal religions address all three in varying proportions (Mijares 2003). Approaches to spirituality, in contrast, consistently emphasize mind and body, but not all spiritual approaches focus on the soul given the variance in belief in an eternal part of the self (Graham, Furr, Flowers, and Burke 2001).



The model assumes that a person's religious commitment is a complex, fluid, and dynamic construct that cannot be reduced to a statistical formula, equation, a single survey item, or a set of indices (Ingersoll-Dayton, Krause, and Morgan 2002; Hill and Pargament 2003). The lack of comprehensive and sensitive measures for religious commitment is a major weakness in the field (Thoresen and Harris 2002). This framework attempts to rectify some of those deficiencies by proposing a six-factor model for religious commitment that is robust and empirically linked to a wide range of religious constructs. The elements in this model individually and collectively interact in complex ways that make prediction difficult.

Another complicating factor is the variance in religious belief and practice for a specific element. For example, religions vary in their views toward other faiths, leading to a range of attitudes and behaviors from an ecumenical approach, to tolerance, to hostility (Fox 2000). The implications for the workplace are obvious given increasing ethnic, racial, gender, and religious diversity. How can organizations promote and utilize religious commitment without increasing conflict (Atkinson 2000)?

### *Religious Activity*

There are seven constituent elements of the religious activity factor addressing the visible manifestations of religious commitment (Sim and Low 2003). Prayer and meditation are basic rudiments to the dedicated adherent (Healey 2002; Ellison, Boardman, Williams, and Jackson 2001; Townsend, Kladder, Ayele, and Mullig 2002). Religious text study provides instruction and reinforcement of basic principles (Legg 2002). Religious service attendance reinforces interpersonal ties, a sense of community, and a closer communion with God (Fiala, Bjorck, and Gorsuch 2002). Music plays an important role in religious practices by focusing emotions and cognitions on religious themes (Miller 1998). Attending religious events such as seminars, retreats, and meetings further reinforces theological teachings and application (Johnson, Jang, Larson, and Li 2001). Volunteer and community service activities are integral components of demonstrating golden rule principles across a variety of religious traditions (Bos 1998). In addition, volunteerism clearly presents the participant with intrinsic rewards associated with serving others and improving the quality of life in the community. The final manifestation of religious commitment is philanthropy (Forbes and Zampelli 1997). Giving to religious or secular charities demonstrates



commitment to basic religious principles of service and helping those in need. Servant leadership can be largely secular or religious in its orientation. Patterson's (2003) concept of agapao love derives from Christian biblical principles. Agapao love is loving others in a social or moral sense and promoting their best interests regardless of the cost to self-interests.

### *Religious Belief Systems*

The religious practice variables are observable indicators, but their presence is not sufficient to ensure a high degree of religious commitment. Human beings manifest a variety of motives for any given behavior (Steers and Porter 1987), and religious practice is no exception. For example, a person may attend religious services not because of deeply held beliefs, but as a means of furthering business interests or meeting social interaction needs. Intense religious commitment entails a foundational belief system linked to actions and behaviors (Sim and Low 2003). The exact belief system varies, but there are several key elements. They include a theistic or animistic credence system, the belief in eternal life, a deistic (distant) God or an active interventionist one, the presence of divine guidance for everyday living and decision making, and the belief in divine justice in this world or in the after-life (Kirkpatrick 1998; Sim and Low 2003). A final important factor is the possession of a relative or absolute belief system. This issue addresses key philosophical and theological discussions on whether there is an objective reality (truth) that exists independent of human cognition (Schick 1998). Servant-leadership is influenced profoundly by religious systems. This is reflected in the popular press literature on the servant-leadership approach of Jesus in books by Blanchard and Hodges (2005) and Wilkes (2008).

### *Religious Behavior*

From an organizational standpoint, the influence of religion is most clearly manifested in the behavioral realm. If religious conviction and commitment is genuine, there should be associated behavioral indicators. These include golden rule treatment, the practice of forgiveness, and the presence of altruistic actions, honesty, ethical conduct, and servant-leadership principles (Farling, Stone, and Winston 1999; Sendjaya and Sarros 2002; Hodson 2002). Other variables associated with religious commitment include modeling desirable behaviors such as patience, endurance, and perseverance



(Oman and Thoresen 2003). A final manifestation of religious belief is self-love expressed in the form of behaviors that promote physical and mental health (exercise, nutrition, providing and seeking support, etc.) (Powell, Shahabi, and Thoresen 2003). The servant-leader literature demonstrates that the behavioral attributes of servant-leadership are uniformly consistent with religious “golden rule” principals such as promoting the interests of others over the self (Patterson 2003).

### *Religious Cognitive States*

The fourth global factor relates to employee religious cognitive states. These variables address underlying motives and needs that relate to behavior. Religious belief systems emphasize the harmony and consistency of belief, thought, motivation, and action (Houlden 1982). One of the endemic attributes of human nature that makes social science research difficult is that the underlying motivational processes for human behavior are not directly observable (Steers and Porter 1987). Employees consciously or unconsciously mask underlying motives or needs that energize behavior (ibid.). Recognizing and changing motives for action are key cognitions that are at the center of many religious faiths. The model addresses such motives for action as love, altruism, justice, mercy, and compassion, all of which are beneficial behaviors for workplace harmony (Borowitz 1984). Another potential benefit is the absence of cognitive distortions (perfectionism, and all or nothing thinking, for example) that can be a serious risk factor for anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders (Miller 2003; Riso and Newman 2003; Dugas et al. 2003). The final cognitive element is the presence of clear and specific life goals (Snyder, Simon, and Feldman 2002). Goal clarity enhances goal achievement by providing clear guidelines for prioritizing work time and efforts (to avoid being distracted) (Locke and Latham 1984). The servant-leader literature demonstrates that goal clarity is one of the major behavioral elements of servant-leadership (Hu and Liden 2011) as it reduces employee role ambiguity and conflict the associated stress.

### *Religious Affective States*

The fifth factor that influences religious commitment is affective states. Emotions such as peace, joy, happiness, and contentment are associated with religious activity (Harris 2002; Fredrickson 2003). General life satisfaction



is a beneficial byproduct of religious experience (Harris 2002). Life satisfaction is more likely to be attained when there is a perception of life balance, and most religions emphasize the development and implementation of a harmonic mean of life activities founded upon a foundation of proper life priorities (Pargament 2002). A final cognitive factor is the balance between internal and external locus of control (Wigert 2002). With an external locus of control, a person perceives his or her life situation determined by outside forces (ibid.), and individual employee beliefs are likely to influence work motivation and behavior such as persistence in the face of work obstacles. Servant-leadership cultivates and utilizes many of the affective states associated with religious experience, including hope (Searle and Barbuto 2011) and empathy (Washington, Sutton, and Field 2006).

### *Religious Experience Variables*

When religious beliefs are based upon personal experiences that reveal important truths, the intensity of commitment changes (Ingersoll-Dayton, Krause, and Morgan 2002). Key life events such as a divorce, death in the family, or a job loss trigger periods of reflection and search that intensify religious activity (Krauss and Flaherty 2001). Another set of personal experience variables measure the employee's familiarity with various supernatural manifestations and events (religious visions and dreams, speaking prophetically, undergoing a miraculous healing, change of financial fortune, escaping a dangerous situation, near death experiences, etc.) (Turner 1999). It is beyond the scope of this article to comment as to the reality or origin of such events, but it is clear that those who undergo an out of body or near death experience, for example, are profoundly changed (Lommel, Wees, Meyers, and Elfferich 2001). Those who have such experiences frequently undergo a transformation that increases faith, commitment, and belief (Engelmann 1995). Another factor relates to the degree of intellectual skepticism (Exline 2002). The degree of doubt can either intensify or attenuate the degree of religious commitment (ibid.). A related factor is the person's experience with organized religion (Vitz 1999). If the employee's early experiences with religion are negative due to such factors as hypocrisy of family members, religious commitment and belief is frequently attenuated (ibid.). Servant leadership by its nature is directed toward religious related experiences such as transcendental spirituality (Sendjaya and Pekerti 2010) and transformational influence (ibid.).



### *Spirituality Moderators*

A major moderator variable is the level of generalized spirituality. Its essential differentiating element when compared to religion is the absence of a direct association with any formal religious belief system (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003). There are varying degrees of conceptual overlap between religious commitment and spirituality that defy clear conceptualization and measurement (Mitroff and Denton 1999). Clearly all of the constituent factors that comprise religious commitment are associable with generalized spirituality and therefore likely to be linked to the same behavioral outcomes variables such as organizational citizenship. Significant measurement overlap entails a greater emphasis on valid and reliable variable measures. For some individuals, their generalized level of spirituality may be a more powerful influence than formal religious belief.

### *Religious Affiliation And Denomination Moderators*

Religions differ in their relative emphasis on religious belief and practice, two major sources of variance in organizational commitment levels (Cohen 2002; Cohen, Siegel, and Rozin 2003). Other factors that may influence religious commitment include denominational affiliation within a religion (Cohen 2002). There are significant differences in demands that churches place on members that may influence commitment (charismatic churches compared to mainline Protestant churches, for example) (Schaller 1984). The statistics indicate that higher commitment churches are growing at a faster rate than the established denominations such as Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant (Center for the Study of Global Christianity 2003).

### *Human Resource System Organizational Moderators*

Human resource system moderator variables influence the climate for religious workplace expression (Ryan, Reid, and Dik 2010). In essence, they constitute a list of “religion-friendly” practices. A key moderator is the degree of formal statutory policy support for the expression of religious belief. These are in the form of statutes (Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and companion state statutes) and judicial decisions that buttress the expression of religious practice in the workplace. These generally address specific incidents of religious discrimination such as a case that ruled employers could



not discipline an employee for displaying a bible on their desk (*Regent Business Review* 2003). This legislation sets a floor for religious activity in the workplace.

Another moderator variable is the presence of individual organizational policies that support religious expression in the workplace (Borstorff 2011). These policies provide additional protection for religious practice and in some cases encourage such activity. An example of this is the federal government's policy on employee religious expression. President Clinton issued a 1997 executive order to promote and protect the religious exercise and expression rights of federal employees (Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents 1997). Policies of this genre provide the foundation for a religious friendly workplace. It also reduces the variance within a large organization given the many different cultures that are associated with a multitude of professional disciplines, educational levels, functional areas, and geographic locations.

Organizational human resource and management decision-making practices enhance or attenuate religious expression. For example, organizations that promote high levels of competition between employees in performance appraisal and compensation practices may promote less favorable environments for the expression of religion (less teamwork and cooperation) (Deming 1986). Articulating religious beliefs in such environments may be misconstrued in a variety of ways, including attempting to proselytize, imposing an inappropriate behavioral conformity, or as an expression of weakness. Human resource systems are products of the larger organizational culture, and the values promoted exert a profound influence across all aspects of organizational life (Rainey 2003). For example, job satisfaction should be lower for employees with a high degree of religious commitment in organizations that treat clients and employees in a callous and instrumental fashion.

A list of religious friendly organizational policies and practices include workplace chaplains, respecting dietary or dress restrictions, religious and spirituality-based mental health counseling, liberal leave policies for religious holidays and observations, sensitivity in scheduling meetings and other work events, and providing "quiet time" for prayer, meditation, or scripture study (Digh 1998; Cash, Grey, and Rood 2000; Huang and Kleiner 2001; Atkinson 2000; Starcher 2003). Another important component is educating managers and employees on appropriate accommodation strategies (adjustments in workplace duties and policies), religious diversity education, and strategies for preventing religious-based discrimination, including



a clear enforcement emphasis (Digh 1998; Huang and Kleiner 2001; Kelly 2008; Meneghello 2011). Managers have good reason to be concerned with claims of religious discrimination. The number of religious discrimination charges filed with the EEOC increased from 1,709 in 1997 to 4,151 in 2011 (U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2012).

As is the case with other organizational policies, top-level commitment and support is essential (Rainey 2003). Irrespective of the manager's personal religious convictions, all human resource decision making should be based solely on demonstrated job performance. Employees should be able to observe, or choose to abstain from, appropriate religious activities/practices without any formal or informal organizational rewards or penalties (Atkinson 2000; Starcher 2003).

Another set of moderator variables center on supervisor, coworker, and client support for religious expression and its relationship to career development (Duffy, Reid, and Dik 2010). These workplace actors are the most proximal and strongest influence on the day-to-day workplace environment (Tobias 2002). Research in other human resource areas provides guidance on the impact of supervisory support. In the area of worker-friendly benefits, the attitude of the supervisor regarding family leave programs influences their utilization (Newman and Matthews 1999). If family leave is viewed solely as a benefit for women, utilization by men is typically lower (ibid.). When the client population demonstrates a high degree of religious commitment, this facilitates numerous opportunities to practice appropriate workplace religious behaviors such as a public health nurse praying with a patient (Graham et al. 2001). Another example is when mental health counselors receive training to understand and utilize the religious beliefs of their clients in their treatment protocols (ibid.).

Organizational location and size are two other factors that may influence support (Rainey 2003). There are sharp differences in measures of religious commitment by region of the country (Nelson 2002). Organizational size exerts variable, but significant, influence on most organizational variables, hence its inclusion here (Rainey 2003).

### *Person Centered Moderators*

In addition to denominational and organizational moderators, other employee characteristics that may influence commitment include gender, race, and age (Xavier 2001; Wink and Dillon 2001; Harris 2002; King,



Furrow, and Roth 2002). For example, research indicates religious commitment increases with age (Bergan and McConatha 2000; Fisher, Francis, and Johnson 2002). As with the other moderator variables, the directional influence varies (a midcareer crisis of meaning reduces interest in the present line of work). Other person-centered factors that can influence religious commitment include mental and physical health (Taylor 2000). For example, workers with ongoing mental health problems may be more likely to engage in religious activities to provide support, comfort, and healing.

### *Religious Commitment And Servant Leaderships*

The model proposes that higher levels of religious commitment are associated with higher levels of servant-leadership behavior (Farling, Stone, and Winston 1999; Sendjaya and Sarros 2002; Hodson 2002). There is no single agreed upon conceptual/operational definitions of servant-leadership. Table 1 summarizes the collective attributes found in eight influential servant-leader studies producing thirty-nine separate attributes. These attributes are not exclusively religious in origin, but they all can be linked to elements of the religious commitment model given their linkage to religious belief systems, behaviors, cognitive states, affective orientations, and experience. For example, empathy is a foundational affective orientation in religious systems (Francis, Croft, and Pike 2012). Of the thirty-nine, four are linked to religious affective states, twenty-four are related to religious behaviors, five link to religious belief, three entail religious cognitive states, and four relate to religious experience. This analysis demonstrates the inherent linkage between the attributes of servant-leadership and religious commitment elements.

Servant-leadership effectiveness is accentuated by many of the key global organizational trends. Organizations are becoming less hierarchical, and employers that encourage situational leadership behaviors are in a better position to adapt to changing work conditions (Barzelay and Armajani 1992). When employees and managers accept responsibility and are committed to the greater good, they are more likely to demonstrate leadership behavior as the situation dictates (focusing on the needs of your subordinates, co-workers and clients, empowering employees, providing support encouragement and recognition, promoting an open-door policy, accessibility and humility, forgiveness, among others) (Farling, Stone, and Winston 1999; Sendjaya and Sarros 2002; Hodson 2002).



**Table 1**  
*Servant-Leader Attributes and Linkages to Religious Commitment Elements*

Servant-Leader Conceptual Definition Attributes	Religious Commitment Model Element	Researchers
Active listening	Religious Affective State	Spears (1998); Barbuto and Wheeler (2006)
Empathy	Religious Affective State	Spears (1998); Barbuto and Wheeler (2006)
Healing	Religious Affective State	Spears (1998); Barbuto and Wheeler (2006)
Awareness	Religious Affective State	Spears (1998)
Agapao Love: to love others in a social or moral sense, reject instrumentalism, promote best interests	Religious Behavior	Patterson (2003)
Motive: Serve others first	Religious Behavior	Greenleaf (1977)
Needs of other over self	Religious Behavior	Laub (1999)
Servanthood: do others grow	Religious Behavior	Greenleaf (1977); Spears (1998); Laub (1999)
Positive effect on least privileged	Religious Behavior	Greenleaf (1977)
Altruistic calling	Religious Behavior	Barbuto & Wheeler (2006)
Building community	Religious Behavior	Spears (1998); Laub (1999); Reed, Vidaver Cohen, and S. R. Colwell (2011)
Authenticity	Religious Behavior	Laub (1999)
Initiative	Religious Behavior	Laub (1999)
Shares power	Religious Behavior	Laub (1999)
Empowerment	Religious Behavior	Patterson (2003)
Humility	Religious Behavior	Patterson (2003)
Trust	Religious Behavior	Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999); Patterson (2003)



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Servant-Leader Conceptual Definition Attributes	Religious Commitment Model Element	Researchers
Voluntary subordination	Religious behavior	Sendjaya and Pekerti (2010)
Authentic self	Religious Behavior	Sendjaya and Pekerti (2010)
Responsible morality	Religious behavior	Sendjaya and Pekerti (2010)
Moral integrity	Religious Behavior	Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, and S. R. Colwell (2011)
Credibility	Religious Behavior	Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999)
Interpersonal support	Religious Behavior	Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, and S. R. Colwell (2011)
Persuasive mapping	Religious Behavior	Barbuto and Wheeler (2006)
Stewardship	Religious Behavior:	Spears (1998); Barbuto and Wheeler (2006)
Altruism	Religious Behavior	Patterson (2003); Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, and S. R. Colwell (2011)
Egalitarianism	Religious Behavior	Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, and S. R. Colwell (2011)
Philosophy	Religious Belief	Spears (1998)
Values and has confidence in people	Religious Belief	Laub (1999)
Covenantal relationship	Religious Belief	Sendjaya and Pekerti (2010)
Calling	Religious Belief	Barbuto and Wheeler (2006)
Wisdom	Religious Belief	Barbuto and Wheeler (2006)
Foresight	Religious Cognitive State	Spears (1998); Laub (1999); Patterson (1999)
Conceptualization	Religious Cognitive States	Spears (1998)
Goal setting	Religious Cognitive States	Laub (1999)
Persuasion	Religious Experience	Spears (1998)

*(Continued)*



Table 1 (Continued)  
*Servant-Leader Attributes and Linkages to Religious Commitment Elements*

Servant-Leader Conceptual Definition Attributes	Religious Commitment Model Element	Researchers
Vision	Religious Experience	Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999); Patterson (2003)
Transcendental spirituality	Religious Experience	Sendjaya and Pekerti (2010)
Transformational influence	Religious Experience	Sendjaya and Pekerti (2010)

Empowerment is a foundational servant-leader attribute containing both religiously oriented and secular elements. For example, from a religious perspective, actions can be aligned but motives must be internally assessed for true consistency with servant-leader love. Christian servant-leader empowerment embraces an “Acts chapter 2” model of leadership in which organizational members are systematically empowered and developed (Roberts and Hess-Hernandez 2013). The secular elements entails power sharing and delegation, mentoring and coaching programs, individual development plans, adequate resource support and release time for training and education activities, among other elements. The key religious elements include a commitment to succession planning and leadership dispensability, an emphasis on humility by endowing others with a greater degree of success, esteeming others greater than themselves, rejecting comparison and dysfunctional competition, helping others unbury talents and use them appropriately, take joy when subordinates succeed and sorrow when they fail, and serve supporters, detractors, and betrayers with love and excellence (Roberts and Hess-Hernandez 2013). The Roberts and Hess-Hernandez (2013) study utilized qualitative interviews to illustrate these principles. Below are two examples that illustrate servanthood and promoting an atmosphere of altruism through volunteerism:

- As a newly promoted police chief, he worked shifts on road patrol so that overworked officers could take time to be with their families. He did this instead of following policy and canceling all of the requests.



- The interviewee serves on nine different voluntary nonpaying boards. We allow our employees to take one hour per week to serve in the community and get full pay. They see me volunteering and see it as a part of their job.

In addition to empowerment, the other key behaviors associated with servant-leadership are organizational citizenship (Ryan 2002), goal-directed achievement behavior (Protestant work ethic) that focuses energy, enhances persistence, and reduces the influence of distractions (Snyder, Sigmon, and Feldman 2002; Ryan 2002), and stress reduction/coping strategies and behaviors (Shaddock, Hill, and van Limbeek 1998).

Religious commitment should be associated with higher levels of organizational citizenship behaviors (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, and Bachrach 2000; Ryan 2002), job commitment, and job satisfaction. There are three global citizenship behavioral dimensions: interpersonal helping, sportsmanship (high motivation irrespective of the work conditions), and civic virtue (active participation in the life of the organization) (Ryan 2002). Example behaviors include taking time to help your co worker even if it is inconvenient and exerting extra effort to accomplish the job irrespective of the personal costs. These workplace behaviors are closely related to altruistic religious values such as the primacy of duty, denial of the self, and golden rule conduct.

Employees who manifest a high degree of religious commitment possess an inherent degree of discipline that can enhance the employee's work focus by reducing the frequency and intensity of distractions related to goal achievement (Knotts 2000; Hu and Liden 2011). These are the values that we associate with the Protestant work ethic and include high levels of work effort and a commitment to excellence (work as if you are working for God), hedonistic pleasure avoidance, independence (adhere to core values irrespective of the external conditions), and asceticism (Blau and Ryan 1997). As such, these behaviors should exert a measurable impact on workplace outcomes.

Religious commitment is associated with a variety of stress-reducing strategies and behaviors applicable to a variety of life circumstances and settings that reduce the likelihood of burnout on the job (Fisher, Francis, and Johnson 2002; Shaddock, Hill, and van Limbeek 1998). The ability to manage occupational stress is a key attribute to reducing the prevalence of dysfunctional workplace attitudes and behaviors (Knotts 2002). In addition, more effective stress-coping strategies can increase work productivity by reducing the incidence of mental and physical illness (Francis and Kaldor



2002; Fisher, Francis, and Johnson 2002; Powell, Shahabi, and Thoresen 2003; Fredrickson 2003). Servant-leadership behaviors reduced stress and burnout for employees as well (Babakus, Yavas, and Ashil 2011).

### *Workplace Outcomes*

The main hypothesis is that employees with deep religious commitment are more likely to manifest differential workplace application values and behaviors, which in turn, are associated with the various outcome variables (Knotts 2000; Sowders 2001; Browne 2002; Ryan 2002). The aggregate influence of religious commitment on employee and organizational performance, however, is difficult to measure given the complexity of the relationships presented here and the multiplicity of other variables that influence organizational outcomes. The great level of variability in religious commitment among individual employees makes summative impact analysis more challenging. In addition, measuring effects at the global level becomes more difficult given that most organizations are not actively promoting or cultivating religious commitment.

However, the literature manifests considerable progress in measuring the positive effects of servant leadership on employee attitudes, behavior, and performance. These positive effects on employee attitudes and behavior are linked to the desirable character and behavioral attributes of servant-leadership. These include personality agreeableness (Washington, Sutton, and Field 2006; Hunter, Neubert, Perry, Witt, Penney, and Weinberger 2013), integrity (Washington, Sutton, and Field 2006), empathy (*ibid.*) and hope (Searle and Barbuto 2011). The positive effects on attitudes and behaviors are associated with servant-leadership's ability to generate higher levels of self-efficacy in employees (Walumbwa, Hartnell, and Oke 2010) along with greater change commitment levels (Kool and Dirk 2012).

Specifically, servant-leadership has been linked to a wide range of favorable job attitudes including higher levels of organizational citizenship behaviors (Ehrhart 2004; Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson 2008; Neubert, Kacmar, Carlson, Chonko, and Roberts 2008; Walumbwa, Hartnell, and Oke 2010; Ebener and O'Connell 2010; Hu and Liden 2011), employee commitment (Ehrhart 2004; Serit 2009; Han, Kakabadse, and Kakabadse 2010; Schneider and George, 2011), and organizational and leader trust (Rienke 2004; Joseph and Winston 2005; Washington, Sutton, and Field 2006; Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, and Roberts 2009a; Jaramillo, Grisaffe,



Chonko, and Roberts 2009b; Pekerti and Sendjaya 2010; Senjaya and Pekerti, 2010; Schneider and George 2011), and higher job satisfaction (Cerit 2009; Chung, Jung, Kyle, and Petrick 2010; Jenkins and Stewart 2010; Schneider and George 2011; Prottas 2013).

Studies demonstrate that higher levels of servant-leadership enhance favorable employee perceptions toward their supervisors, including higher levels of supervisory support (Ehrhart 2004), perceived competence (Washington, Sutton, and Field 2006; Mayer, Bardes, and Piccolo 2008; McCuddy and Cavin 2008), satisfaction with supervisor (Ehrhart 2004), and commitment to supervisor (Walumbwa, Hartnell, and Oke 2010).

Another key element is levels of employee engagement, which is linked to effective supervisory behavior. Servant-leadership is associated with higher levels of employee engagement (Prottas 2013), lower levels of disengagement (Hunter, Neubert, Perry, Witt, Penney, and Weinberger 2013) and higher levels of employee creativity and helping behaviors (Neubert, Kacmar, Carlson, Chonko, and Roberts 2008; Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, and Roberts 2009b). Not surprisingly, servant-leadership is associated with a more positive work climate as well (Neubert, Kacmar, Carlson, Chonko, and Roberts 2008; Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, and Roberts 2009a; Black 2010).

Another key set of attitudinal measures relate to perceptions of employee justice. Servant-leadership is associated with more favorable interactional justice perceptions regarding fair treatment by the supervisor (Kool and Dirk 2012) and higher levels of procedural justice, which relates to the global fairness of the organizational decision-making process (Ehrhart 2004; Chung, Jung, Kyle, and Petrick 2010; Walumbwa, Hartnell, and Oke 2010).

Another compelling body of empirical work relates to servant-leadership's positive influence on life satisfaction (Prottas 2013) and improved levels of work/life balance and employee health. Specifically servant-leadership is correlated with lower levels of work/family conflict (*ibid.*) and higher levels of work and family enrichment (Zhang, Kwan, Everett, and Jian 2012). The positive effects of servant-leadership enhance employee perceptions of employee well-being (Reinke 2004; Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, and Roberts 2009b), overall health (Prottas 2013), lower levels of stress (*ibid.*) and reduced burnout (Babakus, Yavas, and Ashill 2011). Given the robust positive influence on employee job attitudes, it is not surprising that servant-leadership is correlated with lower levels of turnover



intention (Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, and Roberts 2009a; Schneider and George, 2011; Babakus, Yavas, and Ashill, 2011; Hunter, Neubert, Perry, Witt, Penney, and Weinberger 2013; Prottas 2013).

From a performance standpoint, servant-leadership's emphasis on teamwork and empowerment does result in higher levels of confidence or potency of team members (Chung, Jung, Kyle, and Petrick 2010; Hu and Liden 2011), greater goal process clarity (Hu and Liden 2011), elevated collaboration levels (Irving and Longbotham 2007; Sturm 2009; Garber, Madigan, Click, and Fitzpatrick 2009) and higher levels of team effectiveness (Reinke 2004; Joseph and Winston 2005; Irving and Longbotham 2007; Senjaya and Pekerti 2010; Hu and Liden 2011; Schaubroeck, Lam, and Peng 2011). There is less research on the effects of servant-leadership on employee job performance, but one study indicates favorable effects (Jarmillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, and Roberts 2009). The results are more mixed for overall firm performance with one study indicating higher levels of effectiveness (Peterson, Galvin, and Lange 2012) and another indicating no effect (de Waal and Sivro 2012).

#### STRATEGIES FOR RESEARCH

Given the complexity of this model and the great number of variables, research will most likely proceed in an incremental fashion by testing hypotheses derived from key variables and their associated relationships. Given the sensitivity of the subject matter, careful attention must be devoted in three areas, ensuring that research subjects are protected and protocols for informed consent are followed explicitly (especially respondent confidentiality/anonymity) (O'Sullivan, Rassel, and Berner 2003), that variable measures are designed to reduce nonresponse (Fowler 1993) and social desirability bias (Bainbridge 1989), and method and variable measure triangulation is followed (Isaac and Michael 1981). Careful attention to survey instrument development and interview protocols are necessary to minimize hypothesis guessing and image management (Ryan 2002).

Another key research question relates to the unit of analysis. Depending on the hypothesis tested, the unit of analysis should range from individual employees, work groups, departments, and organizations to entire organizational sectors. Research is warranted for samples of individual employees, either from the same employer or cross-sectionally. There is a need for comparative analysis by sector and work function. Are there significant



differences between public, private, and nonprofit organization employees in the level of religious commitment? Are there sector differences in the level of employer support for religious expression? Are there differing levels of commitment by profession, hierarchical level, line or staff positions, and if so, how do these various levels influence organizational outcomes (Knotts 2000)? A very important research issue relates to the affect of peers, supervisors, and clients. What is the direction of the affect and under what conditions is the influence of religious commitment attenuated or accentuated?

Given that the influence of religious commitment is a dynamic and changing force over time, longitudinal studies that track panels or cohorts of employees would add greatly to our knowledge base (Ingersoll-Dayton, Krause, Morgan 2002). How do factors such as organizational experience, promotions, and other career development episodes moderate the influence of religious commitment (Fisher, Francis, and Johnson 2002; Miller and Hardin 2002)? Another fertile area for research relates to whether there are moderator influences by type of religion, both between (Christian versus Buddhist, for example) and within religions (testing for denominational influences) (Cohen 2002; Cohen, Siegel, and Rozin 2003).

The central focus of the model is to assess the influence of religious commitment on workplace outcomes. From a research perspective, studies should link commitment to the outcome variables at the individual, work group, departmental, and organizational levels. From a “bottom-line,” return on investment (ROI) perspective, does religious commitment improve productivity, reduce turnover, and enhance job satisfaction (Chmielewski and Phillips 2002)? If so, should organizations implement formal policies to support voluntary religious expression? What are the appropriate characteristics and policies of the religious-friendly workplace? How can organizations support religious practices while avoiding violating First Amendment and religious establishment clauses, imposing religious beliefs, and creating a hostile work climate (Digh 1998; Cash and Grey and Rood 2000; Huang and Kleiner 2001; Atkinson 2000; Starcher 2003)?

## CONCLUSION

The workplace manifests great challenges in the area of workplace religion. Should organizations actively promote religious commitment by their employees? This leads to potential conflict in the workplace. For



example, a group of employees that practice Wicca can generate considerable opposition from Christian employees. What organizational policies can support religious commitment without increasing dysfunctional discord and tension? These are areas for ongoing research that will occupy researchers for years to come.

This article presents a comprehensive model for the influence of religion on servant-leadership. This issue is a neglected topic within leadership and organizational behavior research. Employees bring their religious beliefs with them, and the key from a research standpoint is to begin the systematic study of how these dynamic forces impact the workplace while developing policies that support appropriate religious expression.

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