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Is it Freedom of or Freedom from Religion in Organizations?

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Abstract

Organizations in the United States and throughout the world struggle with religious expression in the workplace. Though the US Constitution provides citizens with freedom of religion, as does the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by 169 Countries, this right to free exercise of religion has been translated to freedom from religion in many organizations around the world. Religion, a salient part of personal identity for more than 80% of the world’s population, gets hidden if one’s religion does not contain visible garb. The ability to learn from one another, put aside stereotypes, and discover commonalities may be denied to individuals. This paper examines the concept of freedom of religion or freedom from religion through the lens of two stories drawn from academic and international settings in the United States, Sweden, Egypt, and Israel attempting to highlight the difficulties of bringing religious faith into more active engagement with organizations. Categorical themes are developed to understand why freedom from religion occurs within these settings. Themes include contextual norms, trust, fear, privacy concerns, and a lack of tools.
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FREEDOM OF OR FREEDOM FROM RELIGION IN ORGANIZATIONS

The United States Bill of Rights in the US Constitution prohibits making of any law that impedes religious rights. According to Colombo, the guaranteed first freedom has not been clearly applied in organizational contexts, denying individuals this most basic right. Many organizations “inaccurately imagine the Constitution requires a religiously neutral workplace.” A neutral stance causes stakeholders to hide religious facets of themselves, inhibiting the ability of religion to have a positive effect on business practices. Some state this is a form of religious discrimination. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission religious discrimination involves treating a person unfavorably because of his/her religious beliefs. The law protects not only people who belong to traditional, organized religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, but also others who have sincerely held religious, ethical or moral beliefs. The original intent of the law was not to impose one particular religious perspective on individuals but, to allow them the right to choose if and how to incorporate a religious perspective into their lives. If the desire is to have one’s full-self brought into an organizational environment then logically the religious side of that individual is an important component. Have organizational leaders misinterpreted the intent of the First Amendment? We have entitled this phenomenon freedom from religion in organizations.

The taken-for-granted nature of the dominant freedom from religion implies religion fundamentally “doesn’t belong” in the workplace or is “too taboo” for polite discussion. This reality appears unquestioned, unexamined and taken-for-granted, a durable form of a shared mental model in society. If true, an alternate reality where individuals freely express religious identities may be incomprehensible.

Freedom from religion is not simply an issue in the US. The resurgence of religion in the global context is critically important to organizations conducting business across international borders. Many organizations struggle to determine how to incorporate the influence of religion into the new global economy and for many of these countries the law surrounding the issue is often challenging. “Rarely in modern times has religion’s role in international affairs been discussed with the sense of urgency that it is today.”

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (hereinafter “Declaration” or “UDHR”) was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December of 1948 and ratified by 48 countries. Once enacted all member countries were asked, “To cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read, and expounded principally in schools and other educational institution, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories.” The UDHR was focused specifically on the inherent dignity and equal inalienable rights of all

2 Id. at 2.
6 Id. at 42.
members of humanity. These are the foundational elements of freedom, justice and world peace. Fundamentally, The General Assembly sought to define a common standard toward freedom, justice, and peace for all people within all nations. This standard also recognized that member nations needed progressive measures, which were both national and international, to achieve appropriate levels within their home nation and with respect to member nations. Two of the articles within the UDHR are of particular importance to this manuscript: Article 2 and Article 18. According to Article 2 all individuals are entitled to the rights and freedoms delineated by the Declaration, without regard for their race, color, sex, native language, religion, political affiliation, national/social origin, property, birth, or other type of status.

Article 18 of the Declaration notes all individuals have the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Specifically, these rights include freedom to change one’s religion or belief and freedom to practice ones religion without regard for the venue or manner in which one chooses to practice. Individuals may practice their religion alone, in the community of others, in private or in public with the goal of teaching, practicing, worshiping, or observing as they choose.

Globally, individuals are denied exercise of religious freedom at work as discussion of religious beliefs, values, and practices is discouraged. Denial might be based on societal norms or of specific laws prohibiting the display of religion all together or of particular religions. Organizations miss opportunities for drawing on faith as a resource for ethical guidance to organizational challenges by not drawing on religiously derived value and to help individuals find meaning and purpose in their work. Religion’s moral precepts and narratives inform and shape the morality of a substantial portion of the population. Many, even those unaffiliated with organized religion develop ethical understanding from the teachings of religious figures like Jesus or Mohammed that combined their beliefs with behaving in morally responsible ways.

Religious beliefs and values, central to identity, are recognized as potential drivers for individual behaviors with value for business and society. Yet when people are told not to discuss religion they may be unable to draw on them. An environment allowing such discussion is important as organizations struggle to bring ethical values into their cultures in an effort to avoid misdeeds and corruption. A growing literature emphasizes the importance

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9 Susan Case & Edward Chavez, Guiding lights for morally responsible behavior in organizations, Revisiting the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, 17 J. of ORG. PSYCHOL. 35, at 37 (2017).

10 Case, supra note 7; Jaye Smith & Susan Case, Applying a religious lens to ethical decision-making: My Ten Commandments of Character for the Workplace Exercise, Teaching Anti-corruption: Developing a Foundation for Business Integrity, 180, at 185-191 (2014).

of personal belief systems and values brought to business for ethical behavior.\textsuperscript{12} Personal belief systems and values impacting behavior have been related to the religious background of business people.\textsuperscript{13}

Additional studies examined relationships between religion and responsible business conduct.\textsuperscript{14} For example, Aaron Feuerstein rebuilt his company, Malden Mills, a textile provider in Lawrence, Massachusetts, when it burned down. He continued to pay salary and benefits to his out of work employees. He linked his personal behavior to Old Testament teaching that a righteous man is a man with a heart.\textsuperscript{15} Enhanced ethical attitudes and behavior at work have been increasingly linked to religiosity and religious identity salience.\textsuperscript{16}

Although many apply religiously derived ethical standards in their personal lives,\textsuperscript{17} there is evidence they may not use them in daily business decisions.\textsuperscript{18} Jackall's\textsuperscript{19} multi-organization study of the nature of moral behavior by managers in organizations found “What is right in the corporation is not what is right in a man’s home or in his church.”\textsuperscript{20} A study participant noted, “What is right in corporations is what the guy above you wants from you.” Jackall's conclusion was a “bureaucratic ethic” guided managerial behavior in organizations. Ethical relativism necessitated separation of personal values, including religious ones, from work, and conformity to the ethics of those in the corporate hierarchy.

Despite religion being considered too personal for public discourse, faith at work is increasingly accepted in corporate America.\textsuperscript{21} Many want to bring their faith to work, but struggle with how to appropriately and effectively do this in a pluralistic corporate setting.\textsuperscript{22} Even with noted benefits of faith as a resource for ethical guidance, organizations wrestle with effectively incorporating employee faith at work.


\textsuperscript{13} Tanri Abeng, Business ethics in Islamic context: Perspectives of a Muslim business leader, 7 BUSINESS ETHICS Q. 47 (1997); Louis Fry, Toward a theory of spiritual leadership, 14 The Leadership Q., 693, (2003); Ian Mitroff, & Elizabeth A. Denton, A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: A Hard Look at Spirituality, Religion, and Values in the Workplace 80, 138, 139, 146 (Jossey-BassPublisher, 1999).


\textsuperscript{17} David Kim, Dan Fisher, & David McCallan, Modernism, Christianity, and business ethics: A worldview perspective, J. of BUS. ETHICS Vol. 90, 115 (2009).

\textsuperscript{18} Gary Weaver & Bradley Agile, Religiosity and ethical behavior in organizations: A symbolic interactionist perspective, ACAD. OF MGMT. REV, Vol 27, 77 (2002).


\textsuperscript{20} Id at 6.

\textsuperscript{21} Miller, supra note 7.

\textsuperscript{22} Miller, supra note 7.
Three assumptions shape our work. First, people find it difficult to bring their religious identity into the classroom or workplace. Second, organizations and non-religious academic institutions expect religious identity to be left outside the workplace, creating organizations free from religion. Finally, organizations are currently in a state of freedom from religion. Our research questions follow:

1. Do people choose not to bring their religion to the classroom or workplace?
2. What are the reasons individuals and organizations leave religion out?

We provide two detailed stories where the concept of freedom of religion or freedom from religion is discussed through academic, industry, and global experiences of co-authors. Specifically, we focus on stories based in the United States, Egypt, Israel, and Sweden to demonstrate the variations throughout the world with respect to religious rights and expression. Based on these narratives, themes are developed to help understand the contours of this institutional reality we call freedom from religion, the apparent norm in work environments.

This work is important because of sparseness in scholarly literature discussing religion and behavior within an organizational context especially given the profound role of religion in contemporary society. By bringing one's full self to the organization, including religious values, people can find commonalities across perceived differences, lessen conflicts, and increase trust, leading to an ability to hear and understand perspectives different from their own. Implications for freedom of religion are both at the personal level as well as beneficial to the broad economic sphere.

Literature review

Religious freedom, law, within country context

An estimated 84% of the world's population participates in religion, however, the extent to which religion impacts the culture and legal framework of a country varies throughout the world. Within this paper we examine the impact of freedom of religion or freedom from religion in stories drawn from the United States, Egypt, Israel, and Sweden.

The US Constitution addresses the issue of religion in two places: in the First Amendment and the Article VI prohibition on religious tests as a condition for holding public office. The First Amendment, which is closely associated with separation of church and state, prohibits Congress from making laws "respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This clause is generally read to prohibit the Federal Government from establishing a national church ("religion") or excessively involving itself in religion, particularly to the benefit of one religion over another. This provision was later expanded to state and local governments.

23 James King, Myrtle Bell, & Ericka Lawrence, Religion as an aspect of workplace diversity: an examination of the US context and a call for international research, JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT, SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION Vol 6, 43 at 44, 47, 50 (2009); Paul Tracey, Religion and organization: A critical review of current trends and future directions, ACAD. OF MGMT. ANNALS, Vol 6, 87 (June 2012).

24 MYRTLE BELL, DIVERSITY IN ORGANIZATIONS at 377 (South-Western Cengage Learning 2d ed. 2011).

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The First Amendment secures the free exercise of religion. The Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution prohibits religious discrimination by securing “the equal protection of the law for every person.” Both guarantee religious civil liberties. The Supreme Court of the United States has consistently held that the right to free exercise of religion is not absolute. For example, in Reynolds v. United States (1878), the Supreme Court upheld the criminal convictions of some members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints for polygamy, banned under federal law. They stated, “Laws are made for government of actions, and while they interfere with mere religious beliefs and opinions, they may with practices.”

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbids employers from discriminating against an employee, either intentionally or through disparate impact on the basis of their religion. They must make reasonable accommodation for religious practices not constituting undue hardship for their organization like allowing a prayer space and time to pray for Muslim employees, or wearing a head covering, a yarmulke, by a religious Jew. This level of religious protection aligns with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The United States is one of the most religious countries in the West with only 20% of its citizens declaring no religious affiliation. In spite of religious identification, it appears to be moving from an ideological stance of freedom of religion to freedom from religion in corporations and educational institutions. What we define as freedom from religion involves religiously neutral workplaces that often require hiding religious facets of individual identity. Such workplaces discourage discussion of religious beliefs, values, and practices, creating no venue for dialogue regarding religiously held values and behavior. Religion is often considered too personal for public discourse, not inclusive of atheists and agnostics, and inappropriate for professional dialogue since it can become divisive and polarizing.

Egypt has a large Islamic Sunni Muslim population constituting 88% of its 80 million people. The Constitution of Egypt makes no reference to an official State Church because Egypt is an Arab Republic that recognizes Islam as the official State Religion, and Shari'a (Islamic Law) as the primary source of all new legislation. Constitutionally, the freedom of belief is “absolute” although the government places restrictions on these rights in practice. Egypt’s Christian population, making up approximately 10% of its total population follows the Coptic Orthodox Church. The separation of the state’s influence on religion and vice versa is often undermined. Laws passed by the State are heavily influenced

27 Reynolds v. United States, 98 U.S. 145 at 164-167 (1879).
28 Also included is race, color, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability, or genetic information.
30 Nancy Day & Diane Hudson, US small company leaders' religious motivation and other directed organizational values, INT'L J. OF ENTREPRENEURIAL BEHAV. & RES. Vol 17.4, 361 (2010); Colombo, supra note 1.
32 Constitution of the Egyptian Arab Republic Art. 2.
33 Constitution of the Egyptian Arab Republic Art. 64.
by the State religion and often aimed at persecution of particular minorities, such as Coptic Christians.\textsuperscript{35} Egypt is ranked number 21 for religious persecution in 2017 out of the top 50 countries on the World Watch List of 2016.\textsuperscript{36}

English Common Law, rather than Judaic Talmudic Law, is the legal tradition of Israel. Israel defines itself in its basic laws as a Jewish and democratic state. Judaic law applies in many civil matters relating to marriage and divorce, and politics concerning the Temple Mount and The Western Wall. Israel is a representative democracy with a parliamentary system, proportional representation, a prime minister heading the government and the Knesset, their legislature. The Knesset has codified a number of religious laws into the country’s political laws. These include an official ban of commerce on Shabbat and a 1998 ban on the importation of nonkosher meat.\textsuperscript{37} The Pew Research Center has identified Israel as one of the countries that places high restrictions on religion,\textsuperscript{38} and the U.S. State Department describes limits on non-Orthodox streams of Judaism.\textsuperscript{39}

Sweden’s constitution and other laws and policies, including anti-discrimination legislation, protects religious freedom and beliefs and, in practice, the government generally respects religious freedom.\textsuperscript{40} Since 1951, freedom of religion has been in Swedish law. Studies show that a strong majority of Swedes believe that everyone should have the right to practice their religion freely with few restrictions present.\textsuperscript{41} In general, Sweden ranks as one of the least religious countries in the world with only 29% claiming to be religious. In spite of this low number, Sweden is a country that favors religious freedom. But it is far from an irreligious country. Religion plays a ritual role in christenings, marriages, and funerals, and a cultural role in many holidays. With immigration, especially of Muslims, the religious landscape has become more diverse, yet levels of social hostility towards religion are below average.

Each of the world’s religions provides a code of conduct that guides individuals in their interactions with others, their environments and communities. Although most people apply religiously derived ethical standards in their personal lives,\textsuperscript{42} they often do not draw on them to affect their behavior in organizations because of fear. However, research, businesses,
and education rarely address these organizational and societal “elephants under the rug,”[43] even as many people, in all levels and lines of work, and across a variety of religious traditions, increasingly want to integrate their faith and spiritual dimension in their workplace life.[44]

Contemporary society has unprecedented levels of religious, racial, and ethnic diversity. Global business and educational environments are increasingly religiously diverse. Respectful treatment of all, by creating religiously inclusive cultures, is something organizational leaders should model. Although there is focus on diversity in organizations,[45] religion is normally not included in diversity training. The current level of cultural and religious diversity in organizations creates rare opportunities for convergence of difference, recognition of similarities, and learning through dialogue and understanding. This could lead to deeper respect for different perspectives and discovery of commonalities - enabling collaboration. The implications of not doing this work leads to erroneous assumptions, unconscious bias,[46] hardened stereotypes, dissension and discord. Religious literacy could contribute globally to personal understanding, and organizational performance.

Stories from Experience[47]

Two first person stories, from three faith traditions, illustrate the forms freedom from religion takes in organizations drawn from four countries. They draw on classroom experiences, executive education, and research experiences, each context an important component of these academics’ professional environments. Within each story, the authors examine their experiences of religion and how these experiences represent larger institutional patterns around diversity and inclusion. At the beginning of each story an overview of the country involved provides contextual insight into each case.

University teacher: United States

United States of America

Although a religiously diverse country, the majority of people in the US identify as being of the Christian faith.[48] In addition, Judaism and Islam each account for 2 percent of the population. The United States is primarily viewed as a Judeo-Christian country, heavily

[45] Barak supra note 5.
[47] These stories were first presented at a professional development workshop at Academy of Management in August, 2013 in Orlando, FL called Freedom of Religion or Freedom from Religion in Organizations: Dialogue for Giving Voice to Values, sponsored by divisions of Management Spirituality and Religion, Management Education, and Gender and Diversity in Organizations. Three stories were presented, including one of an Islamic professor who shared his university classroom experiences in both the United States and at a public university in the United Arab Emiratis. He chose not to include his story for publication in this paper out of concern for potential repercussions in the UAE. For the remaining three authors, this is an example of what our paper is describing.
influencing its culture, values, and moral decision-making. From a legal perspective, individuals residing in the US have the right to freely exercise their religion and not be discriminated against for doing so.49

In a secular university context separation and religious discrimination continue to occur demonstrated through an invisible wall into bringing any religion discussion and content by the assumption religion belongs in the private sphere: perceptions and attributions on the basis of religious stereotypes; preferences to work in teams with those sharing similar religious beliefs and social identity; unfavorable treatment of others whose dress indicates association with a particular religion; and keeping one’s religion as an invisible identity so as not to be stigmatized.50

Story 1:
The experience described in this story illustrates how freedom of religion has been sanitized in most organizations so they operate free from religion, including the expression of ethical values derived from religious beliefs impacting individual behavior. Religious identity is rooted in significant differences important to individuals. Often others do not recognize the salience of this identity. There is an explicit or implicit separation of “church” and “work.” Without this identity present, people leave their “spiritual backpack,” which guides them ethically, civically, and prudently, at home. This leads to a secularized identity where aspects of their salient identity are either hidden or denied. Because of this separation, there is little understanding of the “religious other.”

Proposal of a new course. The experience of institutional freedom from religion began with the proposal of a new business school course, Religion, Business, & Leadership Integrity. This course was part of a university initiative around student character development for ethical action and behavioral integrity. The proposed class was based on an exercise described in “Applying a Religious Lens to Ethical Decision-Making: My Ten Commandments of Character for the Workplace Exercise.”51 The proposal was not initially approved.

There was concern the course was in a Business School (rather than Department of Religion) seeking students to discover their sources of ethical behavior… Uses words like Ten Commandments and draws on biblical heroes and heroines as exemplars. The Ten Commandments encompasses mainly Judaism and Christianity. There was further concern the course would be unwelcoming to those who profess no religion at all…

course is not inclusive. It would discourage those who do not see their source of ethics coming from religion or spirituality. What about the atheists? We need to ensure the atheists are comfortable.

We sent the proposal to the Chair of the Religion Department to see if he thinks a faculty member who is not in the Department of Religion could teach such a course…If the course can be reworked so as to be open and

51 Case supra note 10.
welcoming to members of all religions as well as those who profess no religion at all, then the proposal could be reconsidered.

The course proposal was reworked and resubmitted for consideration. The following explanation was provided:

The course supplements traditional ways ethics are taught in the business school, adding traditional wisdom (from religion) never covered as a source of guidance for ethical behavior in the workplace. It draws on Judaism, Christianity, Islam, spirituality, cultural background and upbringing, and is applicable to atheists as well as those with faith traditions from eastern religions. It will be taught in an open, welcoming way to members of all religions and those who profess no religion at all. The Ten Commandments of Character is an exercise embedded within the course to have students think of their code of conduct based on their salient identities and how this can assist them in acting with integrity in the classroom and in the workplace.

Although ultimately funded for curriculum development, two different curriculum committees expressed concerns it was not inclusive with its use of words like “The Ten Commandments.” In order to get it finally approved, the course was further sanitized to become “Ethics for the Real World: Developing a Code of Ethics to Guide Decisions in Work and Life.” The new description omitted references to the Ten Commandments and biblical exemplars, although it was acceptable to committee members for the exercise to be called “The Ten Commandments of Character.” However, this was not the case within the course description. The new description follows with most religion references removed:

This seminar addresses two major questions: How do the contexts in which we live or work affect ethical behavior? And how can we manage to struggle through personal and organizational challenges if we find they present us with something ethically compromising? In this course, we look to religion, spiritual teaching and cultural upbringing to understand sources of personal values and standards of behavior that might help structure one’s life in the midst of difficult contexts. One way we consider this is through practical exercises including development of your own personal code of ethics, an iterative process designed to help you articulate the principles of your own moral construction. These can serve as a foundation for leadership integrity and moral courage for ethical decisions throughout life and work.

Context. Unlike colleagues throughout the university, this faculty member already had experience incorporating aspects of religious identity into the classroom. She regularly taught a diversity and inclusion class at the MBA level. For two years, she added religion as one of the topics covered during a three-hour class session utilizing a key reading, “Genesis of Integrity: Values and Virtues Illuminated in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam for
Workplace Behavior. After nineteen years of teaching the course, she recognized religious differences are marginalized differences, rarely addressed, even within a diversity class. She, herself, had not come out of her theistic closet until a few years earlier.

This reading, “Genesis of Integrity,” was key to the success of class dialogue that followed. It makes clear religion is a frequent determinant of moral values. It defines integrity as

“part of one’s character, consisting of discrete virtues, such as behavioral consistency between words and actions and espoused values and enacted values, across time and situations; avoiding hidden agendas and acting morally, transparently, and sincerely from internal values – even in the face of adversity or temptation”.

The article further explores common values from the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and their relevance to morally responsible workplace behavior. It links religious beliefs and ethical attitudes around economic development, environmental integrity, and social justice. It demonstrates how a religiously informed lens can be applied to challenges in the workplace about right and wrong, as well as the amount of agreement on behavioral standards for acting with integrity and disapproving unethical conduct that cut across all three Abrahamic religions.

The faculty member encouraged dialogue about individual identity and values including those derived from religious codes of behavior. She was aware that for many of her students, God exists, and for some, this forms and guides their lives. The focus for all was on values at least partially derived from faith traditions (or lack thereof) that impacted behavior. She was aware, even in a diversity class, religion, its values, and attributions from beliefs are hard to discuss. One student stated, “Individuals avoid talking about their beliefs and values so as not to cause disagreement or strife” (WF, UG, 21 years). There was a fear of conflict, fear they would be seen as proselytizing, and fear such discussion was taboo.

In order to incorporate a discussion of beliefs central to one’s identity, it became clear to the professor she needed to model openness, with respectful discussion of the interaction of religious upbringing and culture to create a classroom culture of religious inclusion. Through her own life as an example, she provided a framework, a vocabulary, and tools for discussion of religion with awareness of how her own religious identity had impacted the consistency of her behavior across her career.

She shared three major values derived from her upbringing embedded within her religion, Judaism. The first was Gemilut Hasadim – Acts of Loving Kindness. This involves pursuing kindness, exerting oneself ethically on behalf of others with care and compassion, recognizing the infinite value in every life, and not defaming others through words. The second value shared was Tzedakah – Doing Justice. “Justice, justice though shalt pursue” was a framed quote on her living room wall, always referred to during family discussion about what it meant to be a good person. All family members were expected to behave in the world to both shape and repair it. Ordinary moments were places for good deeds. She had a responsibility to seek a just world, speak up, raise her voice, and give voice to others. She was

52 Case supra note 7.
53 WF is white female, UG is undergraduate; WM is white male; BF is black female
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consistently told to question and challenge authority when justice was at stake for the benefit of others. She was taught that silence was lethal and curtains indifference. Spiritual audacity was expected. Justice also involved recognizing the dignity of every person, respecting perspectives different from her own, having empathy, and never judging another until you stood in his place. The third value, Tikkun Olam – Healing and Transforming the World, includes responsibility to finish the process of creation in a morally just way: protecting each other, loving and protecting the stranger, the weak, those of another color, those of another faith, and the environment. She was to make the world a better place through moral behavior, take responsibility to do the right thing (yirat eloim, the character of conscience), and empower her choices to make a difference.

In the class, she explained how this framed her life-long focus on social justice and social action. Throughout her career, topics and questions studied or the ways she taught were linked to doing justice or healing/transforming the world. Her methodology on documenting women’s lives (and the lives of the marginalized), experiences, concerns, illuminating stereotypes and biases, unearthing subjugated knowledge, looking for structures that suppress, used methods like co-inquiry, sociolinguistics, deconstruction and experiential learning to give voice to the invisible, hidden, unknown, or misunderstood. These selected methods were influenced by religious values.

She shared how these values provided purpose for her life and were central to decision-making. Her intention was to provide an experiential opportunity for every student to do something similar. The classroom activity incorporating religious identity was based on four questions around the “Genesis of Integrity” article.

(1) What surprised you most in the article?
(2) What values do you bring to the workplace from your religious/spiritual perspective? Share some and explain from where they are drawn.
(3) How do these values affect your behavior in the workplace? Give an example.
(4) How could you make the content of the article integrating aspects of religion and business relevant to your work or school context?

Reactions. On student evaluations, the top rated class discussion topic covered during the semester was the session on religion. Of the articles used in the course, the only article mentioned by every student in their journals was the reading on religion, “Genesis of Integrity.” Unlike the expectation of the initial proposal reviewers, students found this class session illuminating and inclusive. A variety of student comments taken from journal entries and the student evaluations made clear the benefits of including exploration of religious identity salience into the classroom, even for atheists. There were no negative comments about its inclusion.

(1) One benefit was student learning from each other across differences.

“I now understand a person’s values, morals, and ‘way of life’ can be a reflection of one’s religion.” (WF, 25, Catholic, MBA)

“My experience and conversation in this class is full of small examples of big lessons I have learned: my way may not be the best for everyone. This is something I realized while talking about religion.” (WF, secular, 24, Danish exchange student, MBA)

(2) They were also able to put aside stereotypes and alter biases and assumptions.

“In preparing for this class, I knew it was going to be awkward for me. I am not religious. I don’t really know what I believe. I have never been to church other than

54 Case supra note 7.
a wedding or funeral. The discussion was awesome. My choices were not questioned and everyone was willing to share experiences and beliefs and for some, how their faith was important to their identity.” (WM, 29, MBA/JD)

“Religion is a topic I love to discuss, so yesterday's lecture was fantastic. Although originally averse to the assigned readings, I found them enlightening.” (WM, Palestinian, 26, MBA/MD)

“I was shocked realizing the Golden Rule was a direct product of religion. Growing up in a non-religious family and attending a free spirited elementary school fondly nicknamed the ‘Peace School,’ I figured this idiom was a product of the hippie love and peace generation. I have never been fond of religion, but this realization altered my perspective.” (WF, humanist, 38, MNO)

(3) They discovered commonalities across the faith traditions, as well as commonalities in their values that surprised them.

“I never connected the workplace and religion. I was so amazed so many concepts about work and how to treat people in business are in the sacred texts of these religions. A real eye-opener. I find it comforting to know that all three religions intertwine and overlap in what they say about how business should be conducted... and that there are ways to treat both employees and customers with respect and honesty.” (WF, Catholic, MNO)

“What surprised me most was how similar all the religions examined are. Society often portrays different religions as incompatible or unable to coexist successfully. In reality, if members of each religious group would be open and honest about their important beliefs and values, as we did in this class, they would discover that there are many values shared between groups, as we did, to our surprise.” (WF, Christian, 21, UG Business major)

(4) As they became educated about religious differences and discovered similarities, they developed deeper respect for differences that make a difference, moving from fear and avoidance to dialogue and engagement.

“It was freeing to be able to say that I am anti-theist.” (WM, 26, MBA)

“It was interesting to talk with anti-theists who still share moral attitudes in direct alignment with religious theology. Who knew?” (BF, Jewish, 40 MBA)

Several students indicated religion provided a set of values and beliefs allowing them to hold themselves to a high moral behavior standard. Some shared what they believed was true and good about God in their lives and how this enhanced their “right” behavior, providing moral courage to act with integrity at work and in life, something they had forgotten to draw on.

Challenges. There are challenges in proposing a course involving drawing on religious identity and religious texts in a secular university. Bringing such discussion into the classroom is not risk free. Conversations about religion could be potentially disastrous. It takes a well-trained, motivated facilitator to pull off this type of dialogue.55 In a second review for permanent approval, there was still concern the course would be more appropriate in the religion department. One challenge in the approval process was ensuring the committee no one religion would be promoted. Another was managing expectations that religion is too

55 ROBERT NASH, DEMETHRA BRADLEY, & ARTHUR CHICKERING, HOW TO TALK ABOUT HOT TOPICS ON CAMPUS 59 (Jossey-Bass 2008).
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personal and inappropriate for classroom dialogue. There was a need to ensure extra care would be taken to not judge beliefs and values, yet not create an atmosphere of moral relativity where any view was acceptable.

Administrators and fellow faculty were uncomfortable within this secular university when religion was proposed to be part of a non-department of religion class. Eventually the structure proposed, after sanitizing overt references to personal religious affiliation and religious texts were removed, by the professor convinced the administration it provided opportunity for interfaith learning through dialogue, and true freedom of religion with diversity respected.

Industry – researcher and consultant: Sweden, Egypt, & Israel

Sweden

Sweden is a highly secular nation with the largest self-reported incidence of atheism, agnosticism and secular humanism including up to 85% of the population.66 A little more than one-third of its population is atheist or agnostic, yet Sweden is a nation that values religious freedom. The Church of Sweden was separated from the state in 2000,57 so Sweden, unlike the other Scandinavian countries, no longer has an official state church, but it still receives government funding. Currently, membership in the church requires formal baptism and the decision to join, of which 62% of Swedes have membership, although only 29% claim to be religious. Swedish law forbids the registration of people on the basis of their religion. Reported numbers on affiliation are only estimates.58 Though the country is still primarily Christian there are smaller pockets of Jewish and Muslim citizens. Although Sweden continues to rank as one of the most tolerant countries of the world with a high majority of its citizens having a positive attitude towards ethnic and cultural diversity, it faces challenges from xenophobia and cultural clashes, like many other countries.

Egypt

Egypt is an ancient culture dating back 7,000 years. The Islamic religion is an important component of life in Egypt, playing a large part in the social structure of the country. Christians and Muslims share a common culture, national identity, ethnicity, race, and language, and live as neighbors throughout the country. Islamic law is used as a guidepost and mechanism for solutions to all problems and decisions. The inherent belief is an individual’s destiny lies in the hands of God, in alignment with Islam. Although Egypt endorsed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights59 protection from discrimination based on religion has been eroding, with increased tensions and individual acts of prejudice and violence occurring.60

Israel

Israel is a multicultural nation with many minorities included within their borders. Israel was established as the Jewish homeland in 1948, and is the world’s only majority Jewish state. Three-fourths of the population are Jews from a diversity of Jewish backgrounds with approximately 76% of them born in Israel and others from Europe, the US, Africa, and Asia. The religious affiliation of Israeli Jews varies with almost 50% identifying as secular, and 21% either Orthodox or Ultra-Orthodox. Muslims, make up almost 18% of the population and are the largest religious minority. Two percent are Christian Palestinians and 1.6 % are Druze.\textsuperscript{61} The Israeli people see themselves as part of a multicultural mosaic with distinct and separate sub-cultures, not a melting pot where the cultures merge.\textsuperscript{62}

Nonetheless, Israel is regarded by Jews, Christians, and Muslims as the biblical holy land, leading to ongoing conflict among these groups. In accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Israel, a co-signer, does have laws protecting its citizens against religious discrimination.\textsuperscript{5}

Story 2:

In this story, the relationship between religion and business across multiple national and religious contexts is examined from a Christian perspective as a researcher and consultant to multinational corporations in a variety of industries. In the process, insights are shared and questions posed about how religion is understood, experienced and enacted by individuals both internal and external to the firm.

Throughout our work with businesses around the world, we have encountered a familiar and influential narrative among many religious and business people alike. We found some people describe corporations with moderate adjectives such as self-interested, profit seeking, or market-driven. However, we also frequently heard much more impassioned descriptions such as greedy, unethical, murderous, thieving, and soul-less. Not all religious individuals have a negative view of the modern business enterprise. Many religious adherents cite traditions and examples such as Mohammed the trader, or the Jewish laws of charity as examples of the inherently positive nature of business. However, there was significant evidence of a powerful, compelling and wide-ranging narrative regarding the fundamentally malevolent nature of business among religious individuals across a variety of national and religious contexts. Several illustrative quotations are provided below:

"The soul of business is just to earn more money." (Swedish Church Priest – Sweden)

"The soul [of business] is money." (Retired Retail Executive –United States)

"Companies are not innocent. Companies are ethic-less, valueless and that nature causes confrontation." (Imam – Egypt)

"Corporations are soulless entities whose only purpose is to grow." (Lutheran Pastor – United States)

The prevalence of this pessimistic narrative is useful when we consider the subsequent calls for increased engagement between the religious and business communities by Pope Francis and others in the wake of the economic downturn and widespread corporate


\textsuperscript{62} Egypt supra note 60.
scandals. However, it also illustrates the potential dilemma for religious employees who hope to reconcile their religious and professional identities. We found many individuals have difficulties reconciling religious values with an economic and organizational system they perceive to be antithetical to God’s will. In one dramatic case, a lifelong employee who had ascended to upper management left his job because he believed his professional environment became irreconcilable with his spiritual development.

A global perspective. In this section several interactions with individuals from Sweden, Egypt and the United States are described to illustrate the diversity of experiences and perspectives people have about the relationship between religion and business.

Over the last several years, there has been a campaign by the leading secular-humanist organization (Humanistema) to raise the social awareness of the unexamined impact of religion upon Swedish society. One of the most powerful methods of communicating their message was to simply take the Swedish flag and turn it 90-degrees to demonstrate there is a Christian cross always hiding in plain view. At the time of this national debate, other religious leaders and executives described the environment in Sweden in a different way. First, a Swedish priest bemoaned, “Businesses are no longer connected to the people that started it.” For him, the disconnection between the historical/spiritual traditions of work and modern realities of corporate life stripped the inherent value in the creative act of production. He described this process as the “rationalization of the workplace” that left the individual without a mechanism for combining the spiritual and professional aspects of work. A Swedish consultant in the energy industry commented simply, “People are finding substitutes for religion... there is no role for religion in the economy.” This division between personal and professional life may seem like a normal and acceptable outcome of our modern environment, but many argue this has not been the historical norm.

This sentiment was also prevalent in Egypt. Islamic scholars argue the disassociation of the spiritual and productive elements of work since the industrial revolution have upset a social and personal equilibrium necessary for sustainable socio-economic progress. One imam expressed:

“The relationships between people changed due to industrialization. The relationship of man to himself changed. He is a tool to make money and not to earn respect... The concept of family changed due to industrialization. You will have to choose family or work.” (Muslim Imam – Egypt)

A marketing manager in Egypt had an interesting opinion about the relationship between business and religion in Egypt compared to the United States.

“In the US religion is very private... no one would ever ask you [about your religion]. Religion does not enter the workplace. In Egypt religion is very public – we have the mark on the forehead and the veil... although

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some companies don’t want to hire veiled women. They want to be seen as forward looking.” (Advertising Executive – Egypt)

In Egypt, she observes there are salient, identifiable external signs of religious observance, which promote religious expression and dialogue. In contrast, she has spent significant time in the US where she never felt comfortable discussing religion. For her, the US was characterized by an unproductive sense of political correctness. Ultimately, she declared, “Trust is absent.” The US simply does not incentivize religious expression. While this case may not be the norm for all workplace environments, it raises important questions about the nature of the relationship between business and religion in the workplace.

In contrast, the United States is unique as one of the worlds’ most developed countries, and also one of its most religious. This sets up an interesting interaction between these potentially conflicting narratives of religion and business. This personal and organizational debate has been witnessed with several clients and colleagues. In one dramatic instance, while interviewing a retired Catholic executive who worked for a large US retailer, he recounted his personal story that involved more than a twenty-five year commitment to a company he believed espoused his own personal values. When asked what should be the appropriate relationship between religion and business, his immediate response was, “Well in the United States we have the separation of church and state.” Surprised, the question was restated to better understand the relationship between business and religion, not the state and religion. This had little effect as he continued to explain why he couldn’t express his religious attitudes in the workplace. After working for the company for many years, he stated he began to question the fundamental principles of the company. One day he was ordered to take down a sign that explained the organization’s commitment to the customer. At that point he realized his personal and professional commitments were incompatible. After working for the company for many years, he stated he began to question the fundamental principles of the company. One day he was ordered to take down a sign that explained the organization’s commitment to the customer. At that point he realized his personal and professional commitments were incompatible. After considering the significant risks and costs, he left his successful career to pursue a life that allowed him to harmonize his spiritual goals with his professional ambitions. For him, it was not fear of reprisal or a lack of tools to express his discontent, but a growing and overwhelming sense of fundamental incongruences between commitments to both God and his company.

A second example comes from a high-level Protestant executive in the financial services sector who has the authority and responsibility to shape the strategic agenda of his entire company. He is an active member of his church. When asked to describe the DNA of the company’s values, his immediate and strong response is “servant leadership.” For him, the idea of servant leadership is simultaneously spiritual and strategic. He personally attributes the ideal of servant leadership to Jesus of Nazareth and is therefore very comfortable incorporating that idea into his leadership style. He does not suffer from the incongruent goals described earlier. However, in public and corporate discourse he conspicuously avoids invoking religious language, symbols, or narratives to justify this emphasis. This is a conscious choice. First, he represents a multinational and multicultural organization, envisioning no strategic benefit using explicit religious language. Second, the overwhelming majorities of his employees intuitively understand and appreciate the coded message – religious symbols and narratives have long been recognized as powerful bases for legitimating. Therefore, he simultaneously reaps the benefits of religious motivation while

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avoiding the perceived personal and professional pitfalls of “coming out” publically as a religious figure.

Challenges. The relationship between religion and business in the United States or around the world varies. We argue there are many individualized interpretations and manifestations of this interaction among different national, religious, and organizational contexts. If an individual chooses to withhold their religious identity at work, there is likely a complex set of justifications for that decision. First, the mental frameworks may not permit the possibility of combining a religious and professional identity. It may be a taken-for-granted and unexamined decision to compartmentalize these identities. Alternatively, it could be a conscious choice by an individual to separate the two spheres. This may be an intensely personal reason or it may be a self-interested rational choice. As evidenced by these cases, we live in a time where powerful voices are calling for a public conversation about the role of religion in social, economic, and political conversations. Therefore, it is important to ensure that individuals have an informed choice about their rights when choosing to enact their religious character in the workplace. With increased awareness and empowerment this reality may benefit the individual, company and society as a whole.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using a thematic framework analysis. Framework analysis approach keeps participant stories intact during analysis, as opposed to breaking apart the data in order to identify new theoretical elements. Framework analysis general proceeds through five steps: (1) familiarization with the data; (2) analyzing major themes for coding purposes; (3) systematic application of codes (indexing); (4) the systematic comparison of data within and across cases (charting); and (5) examining relationships among the thematic codes, or mapping and interpretation. The first two authors preceded through each of these steps independently, and then following the independent analysis, the authors came together to discuss any disagreements and came to a consensus on the analysis. The first two authors looked specifically for data that fit themes developed at an Academy of Management presentation.

Results and discussion

Some of the findings align with previous research that demonstrated a number of reasons people may not bring religion into these settings. These include: (1) freedom from religion is the accepted organizational norm within corporate and academic environments; (2) fear of reprisal or conflict (formally, from a boss or informally, including alienation from colleagues); (3) respect for the other, so not viewed as proselytizing (4) individuals viewing their religion/spirituality as a private, personal relationship; and (5) in these contexts, religion is not an appropriate topic to discuss. In addition this research also demonstrated two

66 Judith Green & Nicki Thorogood, Qualitative Methods for Health Research (Introducing Qualitative Methods Series) 2, 95 (1st ed. 2004).
67 Participants in an AOM professional development workshop conducted by authors in 2013 generated list of hypothesized reasons. Similar reasons mentioned in MBA diversity class; Linda Jones, Judy Neal, Molly Longstreth, Rhonda Bell, Higher Education and Workplace Spirituality: Qualitative Analysis of Faculty Resistance and Support, Conference: Association of Management, Spirituality & Religion, May 20, 2017.
additional themes: (6) lack of skills, frameworks, vocabulary, and experience discussing religion and (7) lack of trust. In general, there is a lack of religious literacy. This is an important element of education. Prepare graduates for better engagement with one another across religious boundaries. These reasons were collapsed into five thematic coding categories to assist in answering our research questions: Do people choose not to bring their religion to the classroom or workplace, and What are reasons individuals and organizations leave religion out?

These reasons were collapsed into five codes encompassing all the above categories. Organizational norms were combined with country context; respect for others was combined with religion is a private personal relationship. The following categories, applied to each story, follow: (1) Context (including national contexts, country, and organizational norms); (2) Trust (of individual and/or organizational processes); (3) Fear (both formal and informal at organizational, group, and individual levels); (4) Privacy (including respect for others); and (5) Tools (lack of individual knowledge and skills about incorporating religious identity into organizations).

Context driven experiences

This category refers to the context of nation, country, or organizational norms. The thematic analysis of stories demonstrated contextual reasons religion was not incorporated into organizations.

Story 1 offered the strongest examples of contextual barriers to inclusion of religion within organizational discourse. Based on a university call for interdisciplinary courses, the instructor proposed a course focused on student character development and ethics, expanding an exercise she developed in an article for teaching anti-corruption, “My Ten Commandments of Character for the Workplace Exercise.” Throughout the review process the course was continually criticized as inappropriate within a business school, taught by a faculty member not in the Religion Department, “unwelcoming” to students of various faiths or atheists, therefore not inclusive. After numerous iterations of the syllabus and deletion of most religiously oriented material, the course was finally approved.

Story 2 begins with a characterization of organizations by many interviewed as, “self-interested”, “profit-seeking”, “greedy”, “unethical”, “murderous”, “thieving”, and “soulless.” This leads many individuals to have difficulty reconciling their religious values with an economic or organizational system they perceive to be antithetical to “God’s will.” Some felt this so strongly they needed to leave their jobs to reconcile their professional and spiritual selves. In a contrasting experience, a high-level executive in the financial services sector saw himself as a servant leader like Jesus was and very comfortable incorporating servant leadership into his organization. Nonetheless, he avoided using religious language, symbols, or narratives. He consciously secularized his leadership style given his awareness that using explicit religious language would have no strategic organizational benefit.

In Sweden, a priest described the effort of “rationalization of the workplace” which left individuals without a mechanism to combine the spiritual and professional aspects of work. A Swedish consultant similarly observed this secularization stating, “People are finding substitutes for religion... there is no role for religion in the economy.” Even in Egypt, the process of industrialization has increased the separation of religious practice and the work of business.
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Concepts of trust

This category refers to felt trust of others or trust of organizational processes regarding the inclusion of religious talk within their organization. Thematic analysis demonstrated examples where trust was important for respondents.

Story 1 offered examples where trust influenced behavior. Trust issues were prevalent when the course was being developed. Regardless of explicit statements the course would be inclusive and respectful of all students, university leadership was distrustful of the role of religion in the classroom. Trust was also apparent within class discussions. The instructor modeled openness, shared her religious identity and values drawn from it to her professional life, teaching ways to respectfully dialogue about religious upbringing and its impact on behavior. Her process allowed students to trust her intentions, dialogue about religious and cultural identity, and ultimately trust their fellow classmates.

Story 2 involved lack of trust inhibiting free expression of religion in conversations. An advertising executive in Egypt found tremendous disconnects between her home culture and the United States. She stated, “Trust is absent” in the US environment and religious expression is not encouraged. In this story there were many individuals who struggled balancing their personal religious values in organizational systems that they perceived to be antithetical to their faith traditions. In one example from the US, someone in upper management left his job because he could not reconcile his own religious perspective and trust that his organizational environment would allow its expression.

Concepts of fear driven experiences

This category refers to fear an individual may feel or experience regarding inclusion of religious talk within their organization. Stories demonstrated examples of fear of reprisal. There was fear of what may happen if they were to openly discuss religion as well as fear of conflict as a result of such conversations. This fear came from both formal and informal organizational channels.

In Story 1 there was concern from university faculty and administrators that a course on religion and business would be unwelcoming to those who were atheists. At initial stages of the review, the professor received the following response from the University Review Committee:

“There was a concern the course was unwelcoming to those who profess no religion at all...the course is not inclusive. What about the atheists? We need to ensure the atheists are comfortable.”

After numerous course iterations, the final accepted version had most references to religion removed since the Review Committee thought this was the safest method to avoid potential problems. The organizational rationale for excluding a religious lens from the course included fear of offending students, fear of excluding students, and fear of group conflict.

Previously the professor integrated the topic of religious identity into a Diversity and Inclusion course she taught. Dialogue was encouraged surrounding identity and values. Some students were initially uncomfortable sharing aspects of religious identity thinking the topic of religion was taboo in a secular university, expressing fear of conflict, and fear they
would be seen as proselytizing if talking about religious views and values. These views were similar to the review committee.

In story 2, the marketing manager who felt a lack of trust in cross cultural interactions, also stated she had never felt comfortable in discussing religion in the United States which she characterized by its unproductive sense of political correctness. Religion does not enter the workplace. It was something you were not asked about. She was used to her religion being salient, identifiable, and accepted in Egypt where she wore a veil and had a mark on her forehead. It appears that she was afraid when interacting with people from the United States. She did not trust how they would react to the visible signs of her Muslim religion, leading to avoidance of any conversation about religion. She stated, “In the US religion is very private... no one would ever ask you about your religion.” Religion does not enter the workplace.

Development of privacy concepts

This category refers to the belief that religion is private. It also includes respect for privacy of others. Each Story included examples of privacy issues from respondents.

In Story 1 the importance of managing conversations surrounding religion was important in dealings with university leadership around course development and within the classroom. Individuals in both settings maintained deeply embedded beliefs that religion was too personal for public disclosure. The Review Committee members considered religion an inappropriate topic for discussion beyond the Department of Religion, needing the Chair of that department to approve course validity and instructor competence, something that never happened for any other of the 26 courses developed during her career at this University. The instructor went to great lengths to ensure privacy issues were respectfully handled.

Story 2 offered examples where privacy regarding religion inhibited free exchange of conversation. An advertising executive in Egypt recognized how religion was public in Egypt but very private in the United States. She stated, “In the US religion is very private and no one asks about your religion.” Similarly, a high-level US Protestant executive went to great lengths not to “come out publically as a religious figure,” supporting the Egyptian executive’s view. There also appear to be deeply embedded sociological norms of separation of church and state in the United States and in Sweden, leading to many unquestioning the expectation that religion is something you do in private.

Development of lack of tools concepts

This category refers to the adequacy of skills, frameworks, or vocabulary to discuss religion in a secular context. Each story demonstrates concern with a general lack of tools for integrating religious conversation across cultures. These include no prior experiences discussing religion or allowing religion to have a place within the workplace, except for particular holidays. There were many examples categorized as having a lack of tools that led to freedom from religion within organizations.

Story 1 included experiences drawn from teaching diversity in which religion and the values associated with religious identity were discussed as part of the curriculum. The topic of religion was initially difficult for students. Fear was a guiding force impeding conversations. However, the professor thought students did not know how to discuss such topics. Students assumed the topic of religion was not appropriate since it had never been
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discussed in their work or academic environments. It was clear that they needed a “toolbox” for dialogue regarding how to integrate religion as part of their identity into the inclusion conversation. She stated:

“In order to incorporate a discussion of religion (or no religion) and beliefs central to one’s identity to integrity, organizational understanding, and inclusion around diversity, it became clear that as the Professor of the class, I needed to model openness, including my own identity, with respectful discussion of the interaction of religious upbringing and culture to create a classroom culture of religious inclusion.”

By modeling behavior and offering the example of her own life, she provided a framework, vocabulary, and tools for discussion of religion and the values drawn from it. Her process demonstrated how her religious identity impacted her behavior throughout her career, something she wanted her students to discover in their own lives.

Story 2 provided a similar idea within a workplace setting. Here, the Swedish priest talked about the “rationalization of the workplace, which prevented employees from being able to combine their spiritual and professional lives while at work.” The mechanisms, or tools, for doing so were not present because of apparent freedom from religion the priest saw in modern corporations. Strict separation between spiritual and professional elements of work does not allow the needed competencies for cross religious dialogue to occur. Mental frameworks may not permit the possibilities of combining religion and professional identities.

Two research questions guided the focus of this paper:

1) Do people choose not to bring their religion to the classroom or workplace? and
2) What are reasons individuals and organizations leave religion out?

Organizations in various parts of the world, although more diverse than ever, have difficulty with religious conflict and tolerance. Each of our stories demonstrate some individuals strive to evade dialogue around religion, faith, or spiritually. Regardless of the context or global location, each story describes individuals choosing not to bring religious discussion or their religious selves into organizations even when religion and spirituality are strongly linked to their identities. In doing so, their religiously driven values used for ethical guidance and finding meaning and purpose in their work are often invisible to both colleagues and themselves.68

Our research demonstrated reasons religion is left out of the classroom and workplace. These include contextual norms of secularism, lack of trust, fear of divisiveness and discrimination, privacy concerns, and lack of tools allowing the expression of individual beliefs and practices. The ability to create cultures of inclusion where people are respected for who they are is decreased when people are afraid to speak in their own voice because of fear of conflict, stigma, or bias. By purposefully creating cultures allowing inclusion of religion might also create contexts where individuals express values derived from faith traditions that enhance organizational outcomes.

Done well, the integration of faith and work has positive implications at the personal level, as well as for corporate ethics and the bottom line. For example, at Tyson, through their faith at work initiative with 115 full time chaplains in their workplaces across the globe, they no longer use an HR department. The chaplains handle all the traditional HR oriented functions and employees are fully utilizing the assets of this department. The central focus of this initiative is a reflection of Tyson’s core values as a faith friendly company striving to take care of their employees no matter what their affiliation or beliefs are. The chaplaincy program helps keep anxiety down, working on task, relationships smooth, and productivity up. Chaplains provide pastoral care, counseling, and support to team members and their families. John Tyson, Chair of the Board, stated that integrating faith and spirituality into their organizational framework is a best practice of their business model.69

From our stories, values derived from religion, provided purpose for individuals, and were central to decision-making. Two of the stories involved creation of dialogue around religion. As people engaged in dialogue, they learned from each other across differences, put aside stereotypes, altered biases and assumptions, and discovered commonalities across faith traditions as well as commonalities in values. They developed respect for differences that made a difference, moving from fear and avoidance to willing dialogue and engagement around individual religious beliefs, values and practices. They enhanced understanding of others. Even within the same faith tradition (Islam), students were highly engaged with religion linked to course content. They were open to ideas, debating each other without pre-judging right or wrong.

Because the US was founded on Judeo-Christian values with strong constitutional and legal protection for religious freedom, a road map for transcending cultural changes at work and in life is possible. Religion defines the basis for values and sets moral compasses, providing a platform to judge right from wrong.70 Many people have a desire to live a holistic life, integrating their faith with their work demands. Freedom from religion makes it difficult to access ethical precepts derived from religious and spiritual heritages that form a starting point for behaving with decency and integrity in all work relations and situations.

People throughout the world want to fully live their faith in all aspects of their lives. Their ability to do this depends on the legal structure of the country and its laws and protections for free expression of religion. In some countries, based on their laws related to freedom of religion (United States & Sweden), it is easier to do. In others (Egypt and Israel), where there is a state religion, it could potentially be difficult, but not impossible. Nonetheless, the value of dialogue across differences has potential value in each of the stories discussed.


70 See Chavez, supra note 9.