



## Religiosity and engagement: Clarifying the relationship

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### Abstract

The power of the religiosity over employee engagement remain unaddressed in the academic context. The aim of this study was to test the association between the religiosity and employee engagement. A quantitative study was performed with the participation of a general sample extracted from the Sri Lankan institutions. The cross sectional study gathered data on religiosity and engagement using a 10 items-three component measurement and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) with 9 items respectively. The Pearson's product moment correlation analysis and least square linear regression analysis analysed the data over which the hypothesis were tested. The results revealed a strong and positive relationship between religiosity and employee engagement. Future investigations are suggested to incorporate other possible influencers and alternative methodologies.

**Keywords:** religiosity, engagement, Sri Lanka

### Introduction

Ever since Kahn (1990) [20] staged the concept of "employee engagement"; the emotional commitment of the employees towards the organization and its goals, has drawn the overwhelming attention of academicians. As a result, engagement has become the focal point of abundant number of definitions, models, measures and conceptualizations...etc (Bailey, *et al.* 2015) [1]. Professionals and policymakers too are increasingly adopting the concept of engagement as a mean of leveraging the performances. Respectively large number of organizations and professional bodies (e.g. Gallup) engage in investigations, consultancy, and manipulation of engagement. It is unhesitant that these professional services should be ideally buttressed by the outcomes of systematic studies of the same.

At present, engagement considered the top research interests of many contemporary researches in the field of management (Crawfords, *et al.*, 2014) [45]. Yet, there are untapped research gaps in the context of engagement for those literature support is absent (Iddagoda and Opatha, 2017; Macey and Scheider, 2008) [17, 27]. Among them, religiosity of employees appear to be associate with employee engagement (Opatha and Iddagoda, 2017; Gallup, 2010; Truss, *et al.*, 2014) [17, 45]. Religion is a significant determinant of employees' behaviour. Moreover, it relates with employee job satisfaction (King & Williamson, 2005) [23], modern management principles (Dent & Bozeman, 2014) [3] and several other organizational measures (Cook, 2008) [9]. Gallup (2010) as cited in Iddagoda and Opatha (2017) [17] found 99% of Sri Lankans place a high value on their religious belief. This is true for both personal and work life. Religion guides the behaviour explaining the duties and responsibilities. Thus, improves the employee engagement.

The aim of this study is to find the empirical evidences to establish an association between religiosity and employee engagement. In view of that, the study addresses to which

extent employees' engagement get affected by their religious beliefs.

### Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a first-rate tool aiding any organisation to strive and to gain competitive advantage over the others. People factor is one which cannot be duplicated or imitated by the competitors and is considered the most valuable asset if managed and engaged properly. It has been emphasized by Baumruk (2004) [6], that the employee engagement is considered to be the most powerful factor to measure a company's vigour. Katz and Kahn (1966) have referred to the concept of engagement in their work related to organisational effectiveness. However, at present employee engagement is found to be fundamental for the development of an innovative and co-operative work environment leading to performance and effectiveness.

In 1990, Kahn introduced the concept of employee engagement, in his seminal paper on 'personal engagement' with work, where he defined the engagement as, "harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". Kahn added that three psychological engagement conditions are necessary for an employee to be rightly engaged: 1). meaningfulness (work elements), 2). safety (social elements, including management style, process, and organisational norms) and 3). availability (individual distractions). His definition of personal role engagement has been operationalized in the form of quantitative personal engagement scales developed by May *et al.* (2004 n=4), Rich *et al.* (2010 n=3), Reio and Sanders-Reio (2011 n=1) and Soane *et al.* (2012 n=3). Moreover, job engagement is defines as an activated positive state of mind directed towards work tasks. Here notation of engagement founded as the opposite of burnout (Shuck, 2011) [47]. Building on this, the 'Utrecht

Group' defined engagement as: 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind' and proposed that an engaged employee has a strong sense of vigor towards, dedication to, and absorption in work activities' (Schaufeli *et al.* 2002: 74) <sup>[40]</sup>. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) has been developed that includes the three constituting dimensions of work engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Originally, the UWES included 24 items, but after psychometric evaluation, 7 unsound items were eliminated so that three scales, totalling 17 items, remained (Schaufeli, Salanova, *et al.*, 2002) <sup>[40]</sup>: Vigor (VI, 6 items), Dedication (DE, 5 items), and Absorption (AB, 6 items) scales. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli *et al.* 2002) <sup>[40]</sup> was found to be the most widely adopted measure (n=148) and has been validated for use in several languages; 42 studies used the full 17-item version; 90 used the 9-item version and the remainder between 5-16 items; one item was a qualitative paper (Bakibinga *et al.* 2012) <sup>[5]</sup>.

Saks (2006) defined engagement as 'a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components'. That are associated with individual role performance', distinguishing between job engagement and organizational engagement. Six papers used this measure; three used both job and organization engagement scales, two used the job scale only and one the organization scale only. Selmer *et al.* (2013) <sup>[41]</sup> argued that engagement could be examined at the work group level and proposed a measure of work group engagement. In another approach, the engagement was considered to be a composite attitudinal and behavioural construct. Swanberg *et al.* (2011) <sup>[19]</sup> adopted the Utrecht definition of engagement but operationalized through measures of cognitive and emotional engagement as well as behavioural engagement. This exceeds the boundaries of engagement construct originally proposed by Utrecht group. Additionally, engagement was viewed as a management practice, both 'doing engagement' and being engaged (Truss *et al.*, 2014) <sup>[45]</sup>.

Another popular description that appears is by the Gallup organisation's Buckingham and Coffman (1999) <sup>[8]</sup> who commented about engagement "the right people in the right roles with the right managers drive employee engagement." They also argued that a fully engaged employee is one who could answer "yes" to all 12 questions on Gallup's workplace questionnaire. Despite the popularity of Kahn's three-dimension model on employee engagement, UWES scale treated to be having a multi-dimensional view of "work engagement" was adopted within 86% of studies (Bailey *et al.*, 2015) <sup>[1]</sup>. Consequently, this study too operationalized "employee engagement" based on short version of UWES scale with 9 items namely; Vigor (VI, 3 items), Dedication (DE, 3 items), and Absorption (AB, 3 items) scales (Schaufeli, Salanova, *et al.*, 2002) <sup>[40]</sup>.

### Religiosity

Interest in religion and spirituality has increased dramatically recently both within culture in general and within psychology. Thus, number of studies discusses the conceptualization and empirical application of religiosity in several disciplines. Majority of them describe the connection between religion and mental health and wellbeing of people (Miller, 1990,

Richard & Bergin, 1997, 2000; Shafranske, 1996) and between religion and physical health (George, Larson, Keoning, & McCullough, 2000; Koening, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Plante Sherman 2001).

Religiosity is a term difficult to define (Fetzer Institute, 1999, Hackney & Sanders, 2003) <sup>[10, 13]</sup>. All the people who have approached this domain have found it difficult to define religiosity when this concept is the subject of scientific research. Thus, there are multiple definitions and models. The majority of theorists say there is a distinction between religiosity and spirituality.

The word "religion" comes from the Latin word, "religare," which means "bind". One interpretation is that of binding people together and humans with gods and their set of obligations. In most psychological and sociological theories of religion, one consistently finds basic social dimension in addition to the individual prayer and meditation (Atran & Henrich, 2010). Shafranske and Maloney (1990) define religiosity as representing the adherence to the practices and beliefs of an organized church or religious institution, while spirituality is seen as having a personal, experiential connotation. In this way, spirituality may or may not include religion; it can manifest itself within or without a religious context.

As to Oman & Thoresen (2002) there are diverse definitions for spirituality and religiosity. They also highlight the need for a standardized, operational approach for assessing religiosity. Hill *et al.* (2000) suggested that religiosity is referenced as the collective and institutional expressions of faith, while spirituality indicates more individualise, independent form of devotion. Thus, measuring religiosity, as a distinct construct, involved the analysis of an individual's self-reported participation in communal, structured religious networks and rituals. Religiosity is generally measured in several domains, such as frequency of church attendance to self-reporting measures of religious participation (Hill and Pargament, 2008).

Religiosity has been found to be generally related to interdependence and collectivism, both in individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Saroglou & Cohen, 2013). Similarly, Putnam and Campbell (2010) found that religious participation was a form of cultural capital that encouraged the acquisition. Scholars saw religious affiliation as a gateway to other social networks, to information gathering and to civic skills acquisition, encouraging participants to join other (non-religious) voluntary associations (Greeley, 1997; Putnam, 2000; Wilson and Musick, 1997).

Religiosity is a multi-layered concept involving cognitive, emotional, motivational and behavioural aspects (Hackney and Sanders, 2003) <sup>[13]</sup>. Richards and Bergin (1997) see religion as a subset of the spiritual, considering that is possible for someone to be spiritual without being religious and to be religious without being spiritual. Being spiritual means having a transcendental relation with a superior being, whereas being religious means adopting a certain religious creed or church.

Diverse dimensions of it characterize the measurement of religiosity beliefs. Among them, a three components measurement of religiosity, which is familiar to social psychologists includes, knowing (cognition), feeling (affect), and doing (behavior). This distinction is not new to the study

of religiosity as such it was formerly discussed by Hall (1891)<sup>[15]</sup>, Starbuck (1899)<sup>[44]</sup>, and Leuba (1912)<sup>[26]</sup>. They have made a clear distinctions between religious belief, religious feelings, and religious works or practices.

The cognitive component is the religious belief or orthodoxy component. Glock (1962)<sup>[11]</sup> called this dimension “ideology,” Stark and Glock (1968) later labeled it “orthodoxy,” and King and Hunt (1975)<sup>[24]</sup> called it “creedal assent.”

The affective component is the feeling dimension and encompasses feelings toward religious beings, objects, or institutions. The work of Becker (1960)<sup>[7]</sup>, Selznick (1949)<sup>[42]</sup>, and Kanter (1968)<sup>[21]</sup> also evidenced the above conceptualization of affective component of religiosity. The term religious commitment has been used rather loosely in the literature, Hans Mol (1977)<sup>[30]</sup> who argues that commitment is an important mechanism for maintaining a religious identity defined it as “focused emotion or emotional attachment to a specific focus of identity”.

The behavioral component is “acted out.” Church attendance, financial contributions, frequency of personal prayer and scripture study, and religious and ethical behaviors are all included in the behavioral component of religiosity.

Religiosity appeared to be predicting many organizational outcomes such as employee performance (Osman-Gani, Hashim, & Ismail, 2013)<sup>[33]</sup>, job satisfaction (King & Williamson, 2005)<sup>[23]</sup>, motivation, job stress, organizational commitment and turnover motivation (Jamal & Badawi, 1993)<sup>[18]</sup>...etc. Further empirical support has called for the relationship between religiosity and employee engagement. Specifically, Nwachukwu, Zufan and Chladkova (2016)<sup>[31]</sup> in their conceptual review of religiosity, high performing work practices and employee engagement stressed the necessity of empirical evidences for tested conceptual associations. Further Iddagoda and Opatha (2017)<sup>[17]</sup> too uncover the gap in engagement with respect to religiosity. Additionally, Roof (2015) proposed clarifying the relationships among religiously, spirituality and employee engagement. On the basis of prevailing contributions with this connection, this study was designed to infer empirical evidences for the association between religiosity on employee engagement.

H1: The religiosity of employees is significantly relates with employee engagement.

## Methods

The quantitative approach supported the clarification of the relationship between religiosity and employee engagement. Employee engagement was measured against three indicators of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale(UWES) with 9 items, namely; Vigor (VI, 3 items), Dedication (DE, 3 items), and Absorption (AB, 3 items) scales. The adaptation of UWES scale for more than 90 studies was treated as a reliable proof of its psychometric properties as a sound measure of employee engagement. Religiosity was operationalized using a 10 items, three components measurement of religiosity, knowing (cognition - 3), feeling (affect - 4), and doing (behaviour - 3) (Cronwall *et al.*, 1986). Both instruments reported high internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha values: religiosity scale = 0.865 and engagement scale = 0.792) (See Annexure 01). The cross sectional study gathered data through a field survey.

A general sample (n =115) of all ages, but presently working for any Sri Lankan establishment (state or private: not including self-employment) was surveyed. Individual employee was the unit of analysis. The multi ethnic/ religious workforce of Sri Lanka is expected to be cause a vivid picture of depict relationship. A blend of primary and secondary literature was utilized in developing and testing hypothesis. The statistical inferences were drawn based on the outcomes of Pearson’ Product Movement Correlations analysis and Least Square Linear regression analysis.

## Results & Discussion

**Table 1:** Demographic profile of the sample

Attribute	Frequency	Percentage
Age (in years)		
Below 25	05	04%
25-35	15	13%
36-45	61	53%
Above 45	34	30%
Total	115	100%
Gender		
Male	41	36%
Female	74	64%
Total	115	100%
Religion		
Buddhism	46	40%
Islam	33	29%
Hindu	12	10%
Christianity	19	17%
Other	05	04%
Total	115	100%

The model age range of the sample was 36 -45 years (N = 61). As such, 53% of the sample was in the age ranges from 36 to 45 years (ref. table 1). This suggests that majority of the respondents are in mid of their career path. Neither beginners nor mature employees are having greater sense of engagement with their work. Beginners often feel ambiguous of clarifying their roles while mature employees who are ahead of retirement, plan for the retirement rather setting high job targets. This assures the presence of apposite respondents in the sample to evaluate the employee engagement. Majority of the respondents were females (64%). Importantly, the sample is comprised of respondents those belong to five religious groups. This reflects the multi-religious nature of the people. It composed of respondents belong to Buddhism; the majority (4%), Islamic (29%), Hindu (10%), Christianity (17%) and other religions (4%).

Both religiosity and employee engagement constructs are highly personal thus dominate the inner forces of an individual. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that other individual characteristics might shape their religious thoughts and engagement practices. An abundant number of scholarly works also prevail in this connection. Thus, it seems essential to test for any differences in religiosity and engagement with respect to individual characteristics (i.e. demographic factors). An ANOVA (one-way ANOVA) was performed to test for possible differences in religiosity and engagement among different gender groups, age groups and religious groups (See Annexure 02). The results revealed a statistically significant

difference in engagement among different religious groups ( $F = 3.530, P = 0.009$ ). The post hoc test evidenced that this difference is caused by the difference in engagement of Buddhist and Islamic religious groups (Mean difference = 14.447,  $P = 0.009$ ). The comparison of mean showed that the mean engagement score for Islam people is higher than that of Buddhist people (Mean engagement\_Buddhism = 3.53 < Mean engagement\_Islamic = 17.98). No statistically significant difference is reported either for religiosity ( $F = 0.727, P = 0.538$ ) or engagement ( $F = 1.497, P = 0.219$ ) with respect respondents' age. Further, no statistically significant differences are noted among males and females relating to their religiosity ( $F = 2.316, P = 0.131$  and engagement ( $F = 2.751, P = 0.100$ ).

The study assumed a significant relationship between religiosity and engagement. The result of the correction analysis was adopted to test the set hypothesis. Table 2 exhibits the results of Pearson product movement correlation analysis.

**Table 2:** Results of correlation analysis

		Religiosity	Engagement
religiosity	Pearson Correlation	1	.936**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	110	110
engagement	Pearson Correlation	.936**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	115	115

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation coefficient supported a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.936$ ) between religiosity and engagement. The said relationship is statistically significant too ( $p > 0.05 = 0.000$ ). The result implies that the religious beliefs affect the engagement. Employees' commitment for their job is significantly derived by their religious beliefs. Religious thoughts nurture the ultimate meaning of one's life. Again, they foster the expectations of life after the dead. Resultantly, regardless of the fact that to which religion they belong, people with high religiosity beliefs tend to attribute those beliefs to their work-related matters too. They then eventually attempt to make their work meaningful for them by ensuring their physical and psychological engagement in the job. Consequently, the employee engagement would be significantly high among the people whose religiosity beliefs are strong. Inversely, those who possess weak sense of their religious thoughts do not care about the consequences of their behaviour, thus are not serious of ill- job commitments. For instance, the Buddhism philosophy highlights (Ref. Parabhava Soothra) obligatory nature of the employment. It is learned that not fully engaging in one's duties is a sin and he/she will be punished for them in this birth or rejuvenated births of them.

The results of simple liner regression analysis proved the predictive power of religiosity as an influencer of engagement. The regression model was statistically significant at  $F = 761.257, P = 0.000$ . (See Annexure 03). Further 87.6% of the total variance of the engagement is explained by the

independent variable: religiosity (ref. table 3)

**Table 3:** Results of Regression analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.936 <sup>a</sup>	.876	.875	.227	1.668

a. Predictors: (Constant), religiosity

b. Dependent Variable: engagement

The regression outcome supports the hypothesis that assumes a greater predictive power of religiosity in engagement. In other terms, manipulation of religious belief will result in significant change in the engagement score. Importantly, this appears to be positive substantial relationship between variables concerned. Stronger the religious beliefs the more will be the employees' job engagement. The results of the study endorse the results of the connected studies (Osman-Gani, Hashim, & Ismail, 2013; King & Williamson, 2005; Jamal & Badawi, 1993) [33, 23, 18].

**Conclusion**

The focus of the study was to ascertain the empirical evidences for the relationship between religiosity and employee engagement to address the research gap in engagement with respect to religiously (Iddagoda and Opatha, 2017; Nwachukwu, Zufan and Chladkova, 2016; Roof, 2015) [31, 17]. Results of the quantitative inquiry revealed a strong positive relationship between variables concerned. Further, it was disclosed that a significant variance of the engagement (87.6%) is explained by the religiosity. These results invite concluding a strong and positive relationship between religiosity and engagement. Above conclusion complies with the existing empirical evidences of engagement and related concepts (i.e. job performance: Osman-Gani, Hashim, & Ismail, 2013) [33], job satisfaction (King & Williamson, 2005) [23], motivation, job stress, organizational commitment and turnover motivation (Jamal and Badawi, 1993) [18]. The theoretical implication of the study highlights the contractual interdependence of the two constructs; religiosity and engagement. Again the findings of the study carries the empirical evidences on the theorized relationship. The practical implications attract the idea of manipulating engagement of the employees by means of inculcating religious values within them. This favours the healthy industrial relations at workplace by nurturing the harmony and mutual trust among the organizational members. This strategy further cultivates the social harmony at the society enabling to foster quality of life. Future studies in this arena is proposed to over the limitations of not incorporating the other variables those might having direct and indirect association with the engagement. Further, qualitative approach is also suggested to be an apt approach for testing the theorised relationship.

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