
Religious Expression in the Workplace: Embracing HR Diversity in the New Normal

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Abstract:

Purpose: This study examines religious expression in the workplace as a facet of human resource diversity, focusing on its implications in stationary and remote work. The study explores the perceptions and openness of employees to religious expressions by coworkers and supervisors, aiming to understand the nuanced impacts on organizational dynamics.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The research employed a two-stage methodology. First, a qualitative assessment, second, a quantitative survey of 1,000 Polish employees.

Findings: The findings provide actionable insights for managers and HR professionals on strategies including flexible work arrangements, awareness programs, and fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity.

Practical Implications: The study reveals that religious expressions, such as displaying symbols or engaging in practices, are perceived as more significant in remote than in stationary work. Manifestations by coworkers hold greater importance than those by superiors in remote environments. The research underscores the increasing relevance of religious expression in fostering inclusivity and employee well-being, particularly in the context of remote work.

Originality/Value: This study fills a research gap by integrating religious expression into workplace diversity discussions, particularly within the remote work paradigm.

Keywords: Religious expression, workplace diversity, remote work, stationary work, inclusivity, human resource management, employee well-being.

JEL codes: J24, M12, M14, Z12, J81.

Paper type: Research article.

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1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

Religiosity (or areligiosity) is only seemingly marginally related to the workplace of modern people. It can provide criteria for evaluation, strengthen decisions and a person's contribution in the workplace, e.g., when there is a clear connection between professional and religious values and behaviors (Morrison and Borgen, 2010). On the other hand, possible tensions between religious beliefs (Héliot *et al.*, 2020) and professional identity may adversely affect employees' comfort or their individual performance (Ghumman *et al.*, 2013).

However, the relations between religiosity and functioning at work have not been widely studied in management (Lynn *et al.*, 2010). Meanwhile, the issue of employees' presentation of religiosity (religious expression) can be treated as a manifestation of the diversity of human resources. When organizations support religious expression, it can serve as a coping mechanism for employees, fostering a sense of belonging and strengthening workplace relationships (Jeon and Choi, 2021). A lack of support for religious expression can lead to feelings of alienation and reduced job satisfaction (Scheitle and Ecklund, 2017).

Workforce diversity encompasses a wide range of characteristics including race, gender, ethnicity, and religion (Golka, 2010). Categorizing people as "different" can simultaneously be about objective markers (e.g., appearance), natural characteristics (skin color, gender, age), cultural (related to faith, language) and conscious (including associations and assessments based on stereotypes) (Golka, 2010).

Diversity in the workplace is not only visible or superficial differences, but also differences that manifest in behavior, such as religious differences (Ghumman *et al.*, 2016). This is crucial in multicultural workplaces, where religious backgrounds can promote creativity and innovation (Rizal and Mustapita, 2023; Scheitle and Ecklund, 2017).

Individuals for whom religious identity is important will tend to express it at work and will primarily choose a job that is familiar with their identity (Héliot *et al.*, 2020; Ramarajan and Reid, 2013). The intersection of religious identity with other dimensions of diversity, can complicate the experience of individuals, especially those who may set basic concepts of thinning (Tariq and Syed, 2017; Yeste *et al.*, 2022).

In our study, we address the issue of openness of co-workers and superiors to manifestations of an employee's religious expression and what may determine this openness. Both stationary and remote work had been taken into account. We assume that the expression of religious beliefs (presenting one's religiosity) may have different meanings in stationary and remote work. Certain manifestations of expression will be perceived by the environment as "more significant", "bright" in the case of remote work - due to the specificity of communication.

The aim of our study was to identify the manifestations of religious expression in the professional environment described in the literature and their potential meanings for the organization and the employees. A set of manifestations of religious expression was created that may affect the functioning of a person in the organization. Then, we compared the meanings of various elements of the team's religious diversity in the situation of remote and stationary work.

2. Research Methodology

A series of interviews with 10 academic experts who deal with the topic of HRM were conducted as a first study. The method of competent judges as a procedure for developing a measurement tool and to reduce the researcher's subjective errors is a well-established method in the field of social sciences and management (DeVellis, 2017). Experts, in accordance with the guidelines (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004), were provided with: (1) aim of the research (2) a set of manifestations of religious expression were worth to consider.

These interviews were informal in nature, and the interviewees submitted their comments on the presented questionnaire orally or in writing. The experts submitted comments on the cafeteria of answers presented to them, proposed measurement scale, number of questions and level of detail.

They therefore answered which of the behaviors we described were manifestations of religious expression and whether they seemed to be important from an organizational point of view. The result of this stage was the elimination of unclear statements and the final definition of 16 questionnaire questions.

The second stage of the research was a questionnaire used as a diagnostic survey as a method of investigating relatively new situation and exploration of phenomena/issues that are poorly understood. The subject of investigation was the importance of manifestations of religiosity in the workplace.

We decided to ask respondents about the importance to them (in the situation of remote and stationary work): the presence in the team of people declaring affiliation with a specific religion (denomination) by expressing opinions, comments, gestures, etc.; presenting religious symbols at work (e.g., elements of clothing); openly expressing views regarding one's own and other people's denomination/religion; presenting specific behaviors related to practicing religion in the workplace.

These issues concerned both situations with a co-worker and a supervisor. We also added questions about the importance of organizing work in a way that allows for religious practices (celebrating holidays, following recommendations derived from religion, both in remote and stationary work. The survey questionnaire consists of 16 questions, in which respondents made a choice from the indicated answer options) and a personal data sheet (the respondent's age, gender, education, work experience,

the nature of the position held and experience related to remote work). All questions were closed and disjunctive on five-point Likert's scale.

The survey was anonymous, one-off and unsupervised. The CAWI technique was chosen. The sample selection was random, based on the availability of the respondents. The aim of this stage of the research was to determine whether there is a difference in the importance that employees attribute to various manifestations of religious diversity and religious expression depending on whether the work is remote or stationary; it was the nature of work that was the basic independent variable in our research model.

Another independent variable we analyzed is whether certain manifestations of religious expression come from a supervisor or a co-worker. The basic dependent variable is the meaning (significance, importance) of various manifestations of religious expression of employees (coworkers and supervisors) for the respondents.

We put forward the null hypothesis:

- *H0: There are no differences in the meanings that the respondents attribute to selected manifestations of religious diversity (religious expression) in the workplace depending on whether the work is remote or stationary.*
- *H1: There is a difference in the meaning that employees attribute to various manifestations of religious diversity (religious expression) depending on whether the work is remote or stationary.*

3. Research Results and Discussion

The survey involved 1,000 people, that had professional experience in remote work (including approximately 24% of respondents holding managerial positions). The group was diverse, but women predominated (65.5%) and middle-aged workers (66.3% middle-aged workers, 30.8% and 2.9% people over 60).

Respondents with higher education predominated (59.9% compared to 34.3%, with secondary education and 4.8% with vocational education and 1% with primary and lower secondary education), working in small teams (55% of survey participants worked in teams of several people, while 29.5% of respondents worked on a daily basis in teams of 20 or more people).

Our respondents came mainly from small and medium-sized enterprises (54.8% compared to 17.3% of respondents employed in micro-organizations or 27.9% of respondents employed in large companies). People who did not hold managerial positions predominated (73.5%) and had considerable professional experience (19.7% declared over 15 years of work experience, 43% declared 5 and 15 years, and only 2.2% less than one year). 24.3% of respondents worked remotely for less than 25% of their working time, 23% of respondents chose the option "25-49% of

working time", 21.4% chose the option "50-74% of working time", 17.1% of respondents chose the option "75-99% of working time". 14.2% of people worked 100% remotely.

The tool used in the study is characterized by high reliability, both in terms of the overall questionnaire result (Cronbach's alpha 0.96) and separately counted items related to stationary work (Cronbach's alpha 0.95) and remote work (Cronbach's alpha 0.95).

The use of exploratory factor analysis for 16 items explains 65.76% of the total variance (the method of extracting factors - principal components). When divided into questions related to stationary and remote work - for stationary, 8 extracted items explain 73.22% of the total variance, similarly for items related to remote work - they explain 73.64% of the total variance.

We initially analyzed the results using statistical analysis tools, determining basic descriptive statistics. The results indicate that the expression of religiosity of the team is more important to the respondents in the remote work situation (Table 1). The respondents consider the display/wearing of religious symbols during work to be the most significant (both in the remote and stationary work situation), while the least significant element for them is organizing work in a way that enables the implementation of religious practices.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

The importance of manifestations of religious diversity/ expression of religiosity	N	Mean	Stand dev.	Min	Max	Percentiles		
						25.	50.	75.
In the case of stationary work								
The presence of people in the team declaring their affiliation to a denomination/religion	1000	2.66	1,237	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00
A coworker displaying/wearing religious symbols at work	1000	2.86	1,213	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00
Displaying/wearing religious symbols at work by a superior	1000	2.90	1,216	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00
Open expression of views by a co- worker regarding his/her religion or the religious affiliation of other people	1000	2.68	1,179	1	5	2.00	3.00	3.00
Open expression of views by a superior regarding his/her own religion or the religious affiliation of other people	1000	2.68	1,205	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00
Displaying religious behavior/practices by a coworker	1000	2.72	1,200	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00
Presentation of religious behavior/practices by a superior	1000	2.72	1,188	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00

Organizing work in a way that allows for the implementation of religious practices	1000	2.61	1,154	1	5	2.00	3.00	3.00
In a remote work situation								
The presence of people in the team who openly declare their affiliation with a specific denomination/religion	1000	3.04	1,244	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00
A coworker displaying/wearing religious symbols at work	1000	3.21	1,292	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00
Displaying/wearing religious symbols at work by a superior	1000	3.19	1,240	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00
Open expression of views by a co-worker regarding his/her religion or the religious affiliation of other people	1000	2.96	1,192	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00
Open expression of views by a superior regarding his/her own religion or the religious affiliation of other people	1000	2.91	1,215	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00
Displaying religious behavior/practices by a coworker	1000	3.05	1,216	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00
Presentation of religious behavior/practices by a superior	1000	2.99	1,236	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00
Organizing work in a way that allows for the implementation of religious practices	1000	2.84	1,170	1	5	2.00	3.00	4.00

Source: Own study.

Analyzing the averages, in the situation of stationary work, the difference between whether it is the supervisor or the employee who displays their religiosity at work is blurred. Only in one case in stationary work (presenting/wearing religious symbols at work) the behavior of a superior (2.90) is of greater importance to the respondents than the similar behavior of a co-worker (2.86).

As mentioned, this manifestation of religious expression in a work situation is one of the most significant for the respondents. In other cases (open expression of views concerning one's religion or religious affiliation of others and presentation of religious behaviors/practices), the respondents assess the significance of the behavior of superiors and co-workers as identically important to them.

In the situation of remote work, these differences are highlighted, and the direction is reversed - manifestations of religious expression on the part of co-workers are assessed as more important, having greater significance for the respondents. In terms of displaying/wearing religious symbols at work (average 3.21 for co-workers, 3.19 for the supervisor's behaviours), in the case of openly expressing views on one's religion or the religious affiliation of other people (average 2.96 for co-workers, 2.91 for the supervisor) or in the case of presenting religious behaviours/practices (average 3.05 for such behaviours on the part of a co-worker compared to 2.99 for the supervisor).

Next, we analyzed the obtained questionnaire results using a nonparametric test (due to the lack of an assumption of normal distribution in the study group), which is the signed-rank test Wilcoxon. These results complement and confirm the descriptive statistics presented in Table 1, where it can also be seen that the importance of various manifestations of religious diversity and religious expression increases in the situation of remote work (positive ranks) (Table 2). These differences are statistically significant in all analyzed cases ($p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Results of the ranked sign test Wilcoxon

The importance of manifestations of religious diversity/ expression of religiosity	Rank Signs Test Wilcoxon					
		N	Average rank	Sum Rank	Z (on neg ranks)	Asymp sign (bilat)
The presence of people in the team declaring affiliation to a specific denomination/religion	Negative ranks	97	156.78	15207.50	-11,259	0.000
	Positive ranks	305	215.72	65795.50		
	Bindings	598				
A coworker displaying/wearing religious symbols at work	Negative ranks	119	158.08	18811.50	-10,257	0.000
	Positive ranks	294	226.80	66679.50		
	Bindings	587				
Display of religious symbols at work by a superior	Negative ranks	107	149.77	16025.50	-9,003	0.000
	Positive ranks	259	197.43	51135.50		
	Bindings	634				
An employee's open expression of views regarding his or her religion or the religious affiliation of others	Negative ranks	96	154.97	14877.00	-9,194	0.000
	Positive ranks	262	188.49	49384.00		
	Bindings	642				
The open expression of views by the superior regarding his/her own religion or the religious affiliation of others	Negative ranks	124	147.37	18274.00	-7,524	0.000
	Positive ranks	236	197.91	46706.00		
	Bindings	640				
Displaying religious behavior/practices by a coworker	Negative ranks	111	152.69	16948.50	-9,853	0.000
	Positive ranks	279	212.53	59296.50		
	Bindings	610				
Presentation of religious behavior/practices by a superior	Negative ranks	112	133.48	14949.50	-8,613	0.000
	Positive ranks	238	195.28	46475.50		
	Bindings	650				
Organizing work in a way that allows for the implementation of religious practices	Negative ranks	110	142.06	15627.00	-7,565	0.000
	Positive ranks	228	182.74	41664.00		
	Bindings	662				

Source: Own study.

There are differences in the assessment of what is important and significant in "religious" behaviors in the situation of stationary and remote work. The greatest differences (Table 2) can be seen in the presence of people in the team declaring affiliation with a specific denomination or religion, which 30.5% of the respondents treated as more significant in the situation of remote work compared to 9.7% with the opposite opinion.

The respondents indicated differences regarding the presentation of religious symbols at work by co-workers, which was more important in remote work (29.4%) compared to stationary one (11.9%). The smallest differences were organizing work in a way that allows the implementation of religious practices (for 22.8% this is more important in remote work, 11% were of the opposite opinion) and the expression by the superior of views regarding one's own denomination or the religious affiliation of others (for 23.6% more important in remote work, 12.4% were of the opposite opinion).

To estimate the so-called effect measure, we used Cohen's test (d) and additionally Hedges' correction. The obtained measure oscillates in the range of 0.2 - 0.4, which indicates a weak and average effect for most answers (the strongest for the difference in meanings that respondents attribute to the presence in the team of people declaring their affiliation to a specific denomination/religion and presenting/wearing religious symbols at work).

Table 3. Results of the estimated effect measure (Cohen and Hedges test)

Effect sizes for dependent samples						
The importance of manifestations of religious diversity/ expression of religiosity		Effect Measure ³	Standard deviation ⁴	Estimate point	Confidence interval 95%	
					Lower limit	Upper limit
Pair 1	The presence of people in the team declaring affiliation to a specific denomination/religion in stationary work	dC	1,021	-,373	-,437	-,309
	The presence of people in the team declaring affiliation to a specific denomination/religion of remote work	HA	1,022	-,373	-,437	-,309
Pair 2	Displaying/wearing religious symbols by a coworker at a stationary work	dC	1,034	-,341	-,405	-,278
	Displaying/wearing religious symbols at work by a remote coworker	HA	1,035	-,341	-,405	-,277
Pair 3	Displaying/wearing religious symbols by a superior at stationary work	dC	,972	-,295	-,358	-,232

³ (dC) d Cohen, (HA) Hedges Amendment

⁴ The denominator used in estimating effect sizes. For Cohen's d, the standard deviation of the sample mean differences is used. For Hedges' correction, the standard deviation of the mean differences plus the correction factor is used.

Pair 4	Displaying/wearing religious symbols by a supervisor while working remotely	HA	,973	-,295	-,358	-,232
	Open expression of views by a co-worker regarding his/her religion or the religious affiliation of other people at stationary work	dC	,944	-,298	-,361	-,234
Pair 5	Open expression of views by a co-worker regarding his/her religion or the religious affiliation of other people while working remotely	HA	,945	-,297	-,361	-,234
	Open expression of views by a superior regarding his/her own religion or the religious affiliation of other people at stationary work	dC	,943	-,238	-,300	-,175
Pair 6	Open expression of views by the superior regarding his/her religion or the religious affiliation of other people during remote work	HA	,943	-,237	-,300	-,175
	Presentation of religious behavior/practices by a co-worker at a stationary work	dC	1,013	-,325	-,388	-,261
Pair 7	Remote work coworker's display of religious behavior/practices	HA	1,014	-,325	-,388	-,261
	Presentation of religious behavior/practices by a superior at stationary work	dC	,978	-,275	-,338	-,212
Pair 8	Presentation of religious behaviors/practices by a supervisor while working remotely	HA	,978	-,275	-,338	-,212
	Organizing stationary work in a way that allows for the implementation of religious practices	dC	,923	-,246	-,309	-,183
Pair 9	Organizing remote work in a way that allows for religious practices	HA	,924	-,246	-,308	-,183

Source: Own study.

4. Discussion of Results

The aim was to determine whether there are significant differences in the meanings that employees attribute to various manifestations of religious diversity (manifested as religious expression) depending on whether the work is remote or stationary. We defined religious expression as: presenting religious symbols at work (e.g., items of clothing), openly expressing views on one's own and other people's faith/religion, presenting specific behaviours related to practicing religion at work (prayers, fasting, etc.) and declaring affiliation with a specific religion (denomination) by expressing opinions, comments, gestures. As a result of the analysis of data, we proved that the significance of all the above-mentioned manifestations of religious expression for our respondents increased (on average and moderately) in the situation of remote work.

Thus, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that there is a difference in the meanings that employees attribute to various manifestations of religious diversity (religious expression) depending on whether they work remotely or on-site.

The biggest difference meanings were attributed by the respondents to the presence of people in the team declaring affiliation with a specific denomination/religion and presenting/wearing religious symbols at work, while the least significant were the open expression of views by the supervisor regarding one's denomination or the

religious affiliation of other people at work and organizing work that allows for the implementation of religious practices.

The latter can be easily explained in a common-sense way, because in remote work, the employee has more flexible working time and space than is usually the case when performing work in company premises. There are research that confirms that remote work can foster a sense of independence and flexibility, allowing employees to express their attitudes and behaviors in a way that is more consistent with their personal values and lifestyle (Charalampous *et al.*, 2021; DeFilippis *et al.*, 2020).

Therefore, the importance of potential "facilities" on the part of the employer, which may affect the comfort of work and the fulfillment of needs (also with the need to fulfill one's religiosity), decreases.

When it comes to the importance of manifesting one's views and attitudes through clothing (in our research, it was the use of religious symbols to express one's beliefs in this area), there are other research results confirming that it is important (individually and organizationally) also in the case of remote workers (Bailey *et al.*, 2022).

According to the respondents there are no major differences in the perception of manifestations of religiosity in relation to whether they are presented by their supervisor or co-worker. Small differences resulting from the analysis of means appeared in the case of behaviors such as presenting/wearing religious symbols at work (which were indicated as one of the most important of all those mentioned in the study), where the behavior of the supervisor was of greater importance to the respondents than similar behaviors of co-workers.

In remote work, the expression of religiosity on the part of co-workers was slightly more important to the respondents. One explanation here may be the assumption that the employee's contacts with the supervisor in remote work mode are more task-related and limited to the necessary, which weakens the possible impact of religious expression on the part of the supervisor.

We included the presentation of a specific attitude through the expression of one's religiosity in the diversity of human resources, emphasizing this criterion, which is poorly represented in studies on employee diversity (Deng *et al.*, 2023; Gebert *et al.*, 2017; Kumar *et al.*, 2022). Our considerations align with Hicks (2002), who emphasizes that religious identity is an inherent aspect of workforce diversity, for which organizations and managers should be prepared.

Consequently, it should be assumed that managing the manifestations of this religious diversity should become one of the important tasks of HR and managers who play a key role in balancing religious and professional requirements, as well as

in promoting a climate of inclusiveness. Undoubtedly, organizations differ in the ways in which employees can express their religious attitude.

Nevertheless, HR plays an important role in explaining the value of tolerance and respect for clients, customers and co-workers. Managing diversity mean modeling attitudes of tolerance, respect and working on areas that potentially generate conflicts in this sphere. It is important that religious expression coexists with respect for the dignity of all members of the organization, regardless of whether they profess religious values or not.

Dignity and respect are the basic moral features of respectful pluralism. In this context, the right to display one's religiosity is an element of building a climate of psychological safety in the organization (Roberge and Van Dick, 2010). For an employee, a sense of psychological safety means the freedom to express elements of oneself without fear of adverse consequences.

They may certainly include communicating how the employee's religious identity and the related system of values and behaviors are related to expectations at work, behavior and relationships, initiating broader discussions on organizational and personal values, both religious and secular, as well as preparing strategies for dealing with events that challenge personal values, as well as barriers to expressing (religious) identity at work (ComRes, 2017).

5. Limitations and Further Research Directions

The procedure we conducted has its limitations. First, the traditional, non-systematic literature review (by its nature) is subject to researcher bias. We also acknowledge that our search strategy may not have been precise enough. Secondly, the method of competent judges used in the next stage of the procedure is associated with the lack of full standardization of the research procedure and the influence of situational factors as well as the subjectivity (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004). Thirdly, the survey study was based on a non-representative selection of respondents. Fourthly, the limitations of our study also concern the tool itself.

The use of closed questions creates the risk of suggesting answers to the respondents. The use of a five-point scale could have caused the effect of central tendency. Therefore, when continuing the study in the future, it is necessary to take into account the need to introduce changes in the adopted methodology.

It is worth considering not only conducting anonymous survey studies, but also in-depth analyses using the individual or group interview method. Such a solution would not only increase the credibility of the study but would also allow for a thorough interpretation of the obtained results.

6. Conclusions

The expression of religious beliefs in the workplace is an important aspect of workforce diversity, reflecting the diverse beliefs and practices that individuals bring to their work environment. Religious expression in the workplace is a key manifestation of workforce diversity, offering organizations both opportunities and challenges.

While supporting religious expression can improve employee well-being and organizational commitment, it requires a nuanced understanding of the potential conflicts that may arise.

Organizations must strive to create inclusive environments that respect and accommodate diverse religious beliefs, thereby fostering a culture of acceptance and collaboration. As the workforce continues to diversify, the ability to navigate these complexities will be essential to organizational success and employee satisfaction (Hennekam *et al.*, 2018).

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