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Religion, religiosity, and leadership practices

An examination in the Lebanese workplace

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify and measure the relationship between a leader's religion and religiosity (independent variables) and leadership practices (dependent variables) in the context of non-western Christian and Muslim organizational leaders.

Design/methodology/approach – The quantitative correlation study involved 384 organizational leaders (150 Christians and 234 Muslims) working in various industries in Lebanon. Organizational leaders supplied their religious affiliation and self-rated their religiosity and leadership practices.

Findings – Results were somewhat mixed, supporting some prior studies and contradicting others. Differences in the hypothesized relationship between the religious affiliation, religiosity, and leadership practices of organizational leaders were noted. The findings revealed that religion and religiosity both have an influence on the behavior and practices of organizational leaders; although the former is much more significant than the latter.

Research limitations/implications – Organizational leaders reported their leadership practices and religiosity, hence self-rating bias. The data collection method allowed participant self-selection, thus potentially introducing self-selection bias in this study. Cultural response bias may be another possible limitation to this study. There were no controls for possible confounding factors (such as organizational, psychological, personal, or environmental variables) that may have influenced respondents.

Practical implications – This study confirmed that leadership practices were significantly complicated by the respondents' religious affiliation and religiosity. Scholars and practitioners may use the results as guidelines to further understand leadership dynamics generally, and more particularly in a non-western context. Leaders may gain practical insight about how to meet organizational challenges in a religiously diverse workplace.

Originality/value – This study sheds new light on how leadership practices may be influenced by people's religious affiliation and religiosity; and especially so in the Middle East where a paucity of empirical research on workplace issues exists.

Keywords Religiosity, Leadership, Cross-cultural leadership, Religion, Christianity and Islam, Leadership practices inventory

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Religion is an institution often characterized as a unified system of beliefs combining various creeds, theologies, and doctrines about people's current and eternal destiny as well as people's relationships with themselves and others around them including friends, enemies, and God (Durkheim, 1912; King, 2000). Religiosity is a measure of religious knowledge, faith, fundamentalism, belief, piousness, orthodoxy, religiousness, holiness, and devotion of individuals and the extent to which they live and use religion



for their own ends (Holdcroft, 2006). While thousands of leadership-related studies, articles, and books have been published around the world, questions have been raised about the universality of western leadership models, theories, and research, and cautioned against generalizing findings in a cross-cultural context because different cultures exhibit varying leadership practices and management styles (Jogulu, 2010). Still others have argued that the “what” of leadership, especially in terms of effectiveness, does not vary across nationalities, even while the “how” of leadership needs to reflect contextual factors (Posner, 2013).

Non-western cultures have significant leadership and followership problems, like the rest of the world. The events of the Arab Spring of 2011 unraveled as the world watched the rise of a populace revolting against political leadership and demanding democratic rule (Lynch, 2011). The result of the Arab uprising was witnessed in the streets of Arab cities as testament of failed leader-follower relationships. In some cases, these uprisings had a religious fervor element to them. Consequently, the influence of religion and religiosity on leadership styles, practices, and perceptions in the workplace in pluralistic countries warrants greater investigation.

Leaders have a major influence on organizational culture, shaping the performance of those they lead in the workplace. Some researchers have concluded that religious beliefs shape the personality, behavior, ethical sensitivity, moral character, and value systems of individuals to varying degrees (Fernando and Jackson, 2006; King *et al.*, 2009; Pekerti and Sendjaya, 2010). Sauser (2005) posited that people’s behavior in daily life and work conforms to their religious beliefs. Although religious beliefs are integral to people’s daily life experiences, faith and religion are often avoided topics in the workplace (Kutcher *et al.*, 2010).

People’s workplace behavior is influenced by a number of factors, among them their family, religion, education, gender, culture, nationality, and society. When leadership styles, religious values, and business goals converge in an organizational environment, unique and often conflicting dynamics are introduced. Religious affiliation and the values associated with particular faith traditions necessarily influence the way that people think and behave, including their attitudes toward authority and nature of intra-personal relationships (Culliton, 1949) and have been shown to play a major role in shaping individual traits (McCleary and Barro, 2006). Leaders may ignore religion’s impact on organizations or minimize religiosity’s effect on business interactions, but religious differences in an organizational setting may increase the likelihood of intergroup conflicts (Gebert *et al.*, 2011). Cultural norms often dictate the acceptable forms of leader behavior within the societal laws and acceptable norms, and are also often reflective of religious beliefs (Kriger and Seng, 2005). For example, Jogulu and Wood (2008) concluded that women business leaders are perceived differently in Malaysia and Australia not because of their relative effectiveness in the workplace, but because of strongly held beliefs about the expected role of a woman in society, usually based on religious beliefs.

The large majority of studies about leadership have taken place in the industrialized world, but research is scarce in societies and cultures that are highly influenced by religion. Although there are many multi-cultural studies on leadership-followership dynamics, research is needed to investigate the relationship of religion with leadership styles and practices in a global context. Leadership and cross-cultural influences have not been very often investigated, especially in the Middle East (Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001; Ayranci and Semercioz, 2011; Butler, 2009; Pellegrini and Scandura, 2006; Resick *et al.*, 2006). For example, Marcoulides *et al.* (1998) found that participative

and autocratic styles were the major differentiators among business managers in the USA and Turkey. Yeganeh and Su (2007) and Sebhatu (1995) found similar results in examining how culture influenced the leadership behaviors, attitudes, and styles of business leaders in Iran and Saudi Arabia. With Lebanon, Ayyash-Abdo (2001) concluded that the orientation of Christians was less collectivistic and trended toward more individualistic characteristics when compared to their Muslim counterparts.

Religion has been found to have a significant influence on leadership behavior (Fernando and Jackson, 2006; Hodgetts *et al.*, 2006; Hofstede, 1980; Modaff *et al.*, 2012). Challenges arise when employees from different cultures have to work together through activities like outsourcing, mergers, and acquisitions while organizational leaders experience conflicting expectations about acceptable and appropriate leadership practices (Chrobot-Mason *et al.*, 2007; Hausknecht and Trevor, 2011). In studying conflict management styles among Christians and Muslim in France, Germany, and the UK, Croucher (2011) found that religion was a major contributor to the preference of handling conflict; with Christians showing a preference for a dominating style while Muslims preferring the obliging and compromising conflict styles. In studying the behaviors of collectivist and individualistic workgroups in three different countries, Earley (1993) concluded that team members who share similar traits and backgrounds such as culture and religion may have a positive impact on organizational performance. This investigation focussed on the extent of the relationship between religion, i.e. religious affiliation, and religiosity of organizational leaders and their leadership practices generally, and specifically in the context of non-western Christian and Muslim leaders.

2. The problem

Fernando and Jackson (2006) reported that religion had a significant effect on influencing the critical thinking and decision-making processes of business leaders. Certain business leaders may coerce or favor employees who share similar religious beliefs as those leaders (Chrobot-Mason *et al.*, 2007). Even political leaders may take their personal religious beliefs into consideration when setting public policy. Often, the applicability and relevance of leadership literature in a global setting is generalized; and leadership practices that may work well in London or Tokyo may fail in Beirut or Mumbai (Hodgetts *et al.*, 2006; Sidani and Thornberry, 2010; Yukl, 2010). This phenomenon is not necessarily caused by geography, but may be the result of diverse cultures, especially as represented by their dominant religious paradigms.

Studies on religion and religiosity in organizational settings are scarce. Focussing solely on cultural and social effects on leadership while ignoring the possible effects of religious beliefs on leader-follower exchanges in the workplace may reduce employee productivity and morale (Morgan, 2004). A workplace that is intolerant of employees' cultural and religious beliefs may have negative effects on employee production and human capital retention (Burrell *et al.*, 2010). Possessing a global acumen and developing a deeper understanding of divergent cultures such as western, Asian, African, and Middle Eastern cultures are needed to increase the likelihood of business success for organizations dealing with globalization challenges (Bradley *et al.*, 2010; Zagorsek *et al.*, 2004). Indeed, as markets become more global, traditional western ethics could lead to conflicts between western organizations and others from diverse cultures (Carlin and Strong, 1995; Noverita, 2007).

3. Research questions and hypotheses

Lebanon is a small country in the Mediterranean where more than 20 Christian and Muslim religious sects coexist in peace, but can occasionally confront each other in civil wars and conflicts. Religion and religiosity are important parts of Lebanese society (Chaaya *et al.*, 2007) and the country is structured along religious lines (Jawad, 2002). Lebanon is unique among Arab countries in that it has a sizeable Christian population. Unlike other Arab countries, 83 percent of the Lebanese people agree that men of religion should have influence over governmental decisions, but 83 percent also believe that religious practice is a private issue to be separated from economic and social life (Tessler, 2010). Faris and Parry (2011) asserted that Islam encourages its followers to assume the roles of servant-leader and guardian-leader, and studied the relationship between leadership, organizational culture, and organizational effectiveness in Islamic organizations. Similarly, there is a wealth of literature on Christianity and its rooted influence on servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970; Kouzes and Posner, 2004; Vinod and Sudhakar, 2011).

Faris and Parry (2011) argue that the impact of leadership on organizational culture is far greater than the impact of culture on leadership style when leaders and followers are facing problematic and challenging circumstances. Pillai *et al.* (1999) suggest that leadership behaviors that apply successfully in one culture, especially one that is influenced by religion, are not necessarily transferable to another. The way one sees the world as well as how one acts within it is magnified in the context of culture (Zachary, 2000). The unit of analysis for this study was organizational leaders affiliated with two distinct religions.

Hypotheses were constructed to determine the relationship among the religious affiliation and religiosity of organizational leaders and their leadership practices in the context of organizations operating in Lebanon and employing mainly Lebanese workers and managers. Such determination helps clarify the organizational dynamics between diverse leaders and their followers. The research questions guiding this study, along with their corresponding null hypotheses (*H0*) and alternative hypotheses (*Ha*), were:

RQ1. To what extent does religious affiliation impact the leadership practices of organizational leaders?

H10. There are no significant differences in the leadership practices of organizational leaders based on their religious affiliation.

H1a. There are significant differences in the leadership practices of organizational leaders based on their religious affiliation.

RQ2. To what extent does religiosity impact the leadership practices of organizational leaders?

H20. There are no significant differences in the leadership practices of organizational leaders based on their religiosity.

H2a. There are significant differences in the leadership practices of organizational leaders based on their religiosity.

RQ3. Do religious affiliation and religiosity have similar effects on the leadership practices of organizational leaders?

H30. Religious affiliation is a more significant predictor of leadership practices than religiosity.

4. Theoretical framework

The conceptual leadership framework of this study is centered on the arguments of Kouzes and Posner (2012). They provide an integrative theoretical model of transformational leadership that deals with leadership challenges focussing on responsibility and performance, which is anchored on five practices: Model the Way; Inspire a Shared Vision; Challenge the Process; Enable Others to Act; and Encourage the Heart. Following is an overview of these five leadership practices.

4.1 *Model the Way*

Finding your voice, clarifying values, and leading by example are key behaviors for successful leadership. Leaders must clarify and affirm shared values, exhibit sincere altruism, set the example, and live the shared values. Leaders must create the path and walk down that pathway alongside their followers (Schuttler, 2010).

4.2 *Inspire a Shared Vision*

Leaders must envision the future, find a common purpose, imagine the possibilities, articulate the vision, and enlist others to support the vision. Effective leaders are those who communicate their vision clearly (Weil, 2010) by involving key stakeholders in the definition of the vision, in linking the vision to core competencies, and in continually evaluating and refining the vision (Yukl, 2010). The ability to communicate clearly is an important leadership quality for individuals leading employees in the workplace (Schuttler, 2010).

4.3 *Challenge the Process*

Effective leaders experiment, take risks and learn from their mistakes, and refuse to be constrained by the status quo. Leaders exercise oversight in order to be innovative. They develop structures and relationships which foster taking initiative. They find ways to support these efforts to change the business-as-usual environment.

4.4 *Enable Others to Act*

Grand visions become realities through the efforts of a team and not just the hard work of a single individual. Leaders strengthen the constituents by developing their competence and fostering their self-confidence. They promote trust between team members to build effective relationships. Leaders strive to transform their constituents into leaders.

4.5 *Encourage the Heart*

Leaders understand that ultimately the motivation to do what has never been done before requires internal drive and commitment (Blanchard, 2004). They recognize individual achievements and use these people as role models that provide reinforcement about the importance and meaningfulness of what people do. Leaders find ways to creatively celebrate shared values and victories so that people feel a strong sense of community.

5. Literature review and earlier studies

Religion is considered the foundation on which many social structures are built and has been an important element of societies for centuries. Famed English sociologist Spencer (1862) theorized, "Religions diametrically opposed in their overt dogmas, are perfectly at one in the tacit conviction that the existence of the world with all it contains and all that surrounds it, is a mystery calling for interpretation" (p. 14). All the great world religions feature teachings of brotherhood, compassion, equality, and kindness (Allport and Ross, 1967), and religions are organized by messiahs, prophets, and charismatic leaders (Nahavandi, 2009; Schein, 2010). However, some scholars and philosophers have expressed views that religion is an illusion and religious beliefs are reflective of ignorance and fear (Freud, 1927; Hume, 1757).

Transformational leaders are those who unite their followers behind a common shared vision in the pursuit of a higher purpose. This required, according to Bass and Avolio (1994): idealized influence by being role models to their followers; inspirational motivation by inspiring followers to over perform; intellectual stimulation by challenging the status quo and stimulating their followers to question assumptions and reframe problems; and individualized consideration by paying attention to the specific needs of each of their followers. With transformational leadership, Yukl (2010) asserted, "followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward the leader, and they are motivated to do more than they originally expected to do" (p. 275).

Generally, transformational leadership results in increased productivity, better employee morale, higher job satisfaction, and increased organizational commitment; and transformational leadership is usually most effective in collectivist cultures (Zagorsek *et al.*, 2004). Dogan and Sahin (2009) found positive correlations among spirituality, emotional intelligence, and transformational leadership. Pellegrini and Scandura (2006) also reported higher performance ratings, greater job satisfaction, and stronger organizational commitment among transformational leadership styles. Transformational leaders create strong interpersonal bonds with their constituents, who in turn are more motivated to perform and excel in their work.

Debates have been ongoing about whether leadership style moderates spirituality or vice versa. Phipps (2009) asserted that leadership style moderates the spiritual beliefs of leaders; hence, influencing their strategic decision-making process. Other researchers have claimed that spiritual and religious beliefs appear to be affecting leadership style in the way leaders filter and frame information they rely on to make decisions (Sengupta, 2010; Yaghi, 2008). Religion is more of a social membership whereas religiosity is grounded in spirituality and the living of a particular religion's precepts (Holdcroft, 2006). Religion is a pre-requisite for religiosity although it may be possible for an individual to belong to a religious group without actually practicing that religion.

A strong relationship exists between ethical and religious convictions of Arab managers and their subordinates as Arab culture places strong emphasis on individual relationships and interpersonal trust combined with Islamic teachings for respecting others (Al-Khatib *et al.*, 2002; Sidani and Thornberry, 2010). Bekis (2006) studied the relationship among spirituality and leadership and concluded that the spiritual abilities of managers can affect charismatic and transformational leadership styles. Dogan and Sahin (2009) concluded that spirituality is one factor that significantly affected transformational leadership behaviors as the majority of transformational leaders who were studied integrated spirituality in their leadership practices.

Many studies have reported that culture makes a difference on leadership styles (Chrobot-Mason *et al.* 2007; Hofstede, 1980; Munley, 2011). In contrast, other scholars and researchers argue that leadership style is universal as it transcends cultural borders and effective leadership does not seem to be a function of culture (Bass, 1997; Yukl, 2010). Religion is an important influencer of beliefs and behaviors (Rashid and Ibrahim, 2008) and plays a significant role in human behavior (Barhem *et al.*, 2009). In Lebanon, religion is not necessarily a spiritual practice of worship, but instead a determinant of political and social identification (Ayyash-Abdo, 2001).

Christianity and Islam represent the world's most popular religions at 33 and 18 percent, respectively (Gupta *et al.*, 2002). In Christianity, Catholicism is strictly hierarchical, with the Pope and the Vatican being in absolute authority (Platteau, 2008). On the other hand, Protestantism and Islam are similar in lacking a clear chain of command as both religions rely more on a decentralized hierarchy of religious power and a stronger focus on a person's relationship with God (Platteau, 2008). Islam is comprised of two groups: Sunnis, who are the majority of Islam representing the traditionalist faction that believes in the community's power to make decisions, and Shiites, who believe that true knowledge can only be derived through contact with the Imam, their religious leader (Gupta *et al.*, 2002). Generally, Muslims are collectivistic in nature and prefer conflict avoidance and evade arguments in organizational situations if it helps the communal good whereas Christians are historically individualistic and are more likely to present arguments and engage in discussions with colleagues with whom they disagree (Avtgis and Rancer, 2002; McCleary and Barro, 2006).

No universal leadership theories exist. For some, leaders are visionaries who define direction, communicate the mission, vision, and values of the organization (Kouzes and Posner, 2012; Vinod and Sudhakar, 2011). Effective leaders pertinent to this view must understand the expectations others have of them. In Middle Eastern countries, where Islam is the prevailing religion, leadership style tends to be highly authoritarian because Islam promotes obedience, loyalty, and respect for seniority as work-related values (Yeganeh and Su, 2008). In western culture, management styles tend to emphasize performance (Hodgetts *et al.*, 2006). For individualists, priorities are set based on individual and immediate family considerations (Burrell *et al.*, 2010). Hofstede *et al.* (2010) concluded that Lebanon's culture was less collectivist than other Arab countries. This may be explained by the religious diversity of Lebanon as compared to the rest of the Arab world.

In Arab countries, priorities are typically focussed on family security, family harmony, and paternalism whereas in the USA such focus is on freedom, independence, and self-reliance (Hodgetts *et al.*, 2006). Traditionally, Lebanese organizations have a bureaucratic hierarchy with a focus on operations and a strong emphasis on rules and procedures across all aspects of activities in the organization (Dhar, 2009). Lebanon exhibits a high-power distance and a low consensual culture, thus implying the prevalence of relatively bureaucratic organizations, and a low uncertainty avoidance, which may imply relatively entrepreneurial organizations (Deshpandé and Farley, 1999).

6. Research method

This study sought to identify and measure the relationship among a leader's religion (i.e. religious affiliation) and religiosity (independent variables) and leadership practices (dependent variables) in the context of Christian and Muslim organizational leaders in Lebanon, a non-western country. Organizational leaders were considered employees

in an organization who have a management responsibility over the activities of at least one other employee. Just over one-third of the sample supervised one to five people (36.5 percent), while a similar percentage supervised six to 25 people (37 percent), and the remainder supervised more than 25 people. For the purpose of this study, all respondents had responsibility for supervising other people.

6.1 Population and sampling

The population for this study was drawn from all working adults (1.34 million) in Lebanon (Byblos Bank, 2011). The assumption was that one organizational leader exists for each four followers ($N = 268,000$) spread among two major religions, Islam (60 percent) and Christianity (40 percent). Given the large size of the population and the impossibility of including all its elements in the study, sampling was necessary. The sample size was computed ($n = 384$) using two different formulas (Bartlett *et al.*, 2001; Krejcie and Morgan, 1970), resulting in 150 Christians (39.1 percent) and 234 Muslims (60.9 percent). Invitations to participate in the study were sent to 9,500 randomly selected people from a subscription-only directory of organizations in Lebanon. During the 18 week data collection window, 448 responses were received. Data were collected past the quota level to increase randomness and were reduced in number to the quota level via a random selection process.

6.2 Survey instruments

Participants completed two survey instruments. The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) was used to measure the leadership practices of organizational leaders, along five dimensions (Kouzes and Posner, 1997). The LPI has 30 behavioral statements, with six corresponding to each leadership practice. Respondents indicated how frequently they engage in the behavior using a ten-point Likert-type scale with 1 anchoring almost never and 10 referring to almost always. The LPI has been used in more than 70 countries, and validated across a wide variety of organizations, industries, and disciplines (Anand and UdayaSuriyan, 2010; Lam, 1998; Pugh *et al.*, 2011). A pilot test of the LPI, involving 35 participants, revealed internal reliabilities all above 0.70; which is considered quite acceptable (Salkind, 2003). Internal reliability coefficients for the five leadership subscales in this study, using Cronbach's α , were model (0.88), inspire (0.93), challenge (0.93), enable (0.89), and encourage (0.95). An Overall Leadership scale was calculated as the sum of all five practices and coefficient α for this measure was 0.83.

A modified version of the Universal Religious Personality Inventory (URPI) was used in this study to measure religiosity (Krauss *et al.*, 2007). The URPI includes statements like: I use the lessons from the Qur'an/Holy Book/Scriptures in my conversations; I invite others to perform Salat/prayer/religious service; and I share frequently my religious values with my friends. The URPI consists of 99 statements, but was considered too long for use in this study; hence, it was reduced to 60 items on the basis of a pilot test. The 35 pilot participants responded to the complete URPI survey and then items were eliminated based upon scale construction methods using reduction in internal reliability as the elimination criteria. The subsequent derivative measure, labeled Religiosity Practices Index (RPI), had a Cronbach's α of 0.83 (0.79 for Muslim respondents and 0.86 for Christian respondents).

6.3 Demographics

Respondents were asked to indicate on the survey their religious affiliation (i.e. Christian or Muslim). They were also asked to indicate their age, gender, industry,

number of employees in their organization, as well as the number of people that reported directly to them. The sample included 244 men (63.5 percent) and 140 women (36.5 percent). Males and females in the Christian sample were about evenly split, while males outnumbered females by more than two-to-one in the Muslim sample. Christian leaders were generally between the ages of 31 and 50 and supervised one to five people. Muslim leaders were somewhat older, between the ages of 41 and 60, and supervised six to 25 people. The typical organization represented in the sample had between 101 and 500 employees. The top four industries where the majority of organizational leaders in the sample worked were construction and real estate (13.5 percent), educational services (12.2 percent), information technology (11.7 percent), and hospitality, tourism, and food services (10.4 percent).

7. Results

There were three research questions in the study. The first asked whether the religious affiliation of the respondents would impact their leadership behaviors. Table I shows the comparison between the Christian and Muslim leaders in how frequently they reported engaging in each leadership practice. Christian leaders reported engaging in all five leadership practices significantly more often than did their Muslim counterparts. The null hypothesis H_{10} is rejected.

The second research question looked beyond religious affiliation to ascertain more of the depth or devotion to the beliefs, attitudes, and disciplines of each faith tradition and how this might impact leadership behaviors. Overall, the average RPI for Muslim leaders was 217 (out of a maximum of 300) and the average RPI for Christian leaders was 206. Because these average scores were significantly different from one another (t -test, $p < 0.01$), two analyses were conducted, with respondents divided into three roughly equivalent-sized groups on the basis of their RPI scores, labeled weak, moderate, and strong religiosity. Table II shows the results for the Christian leaders and Table III exhibits the results for the Muslim leaders.

For the Christian sample, ANOVA showed significant differences on all five leadership practices. *Post hoc* tests showed that these were mostly because of differences between weak religiosity respondents and those with moderate and high religiosity. For Christian leaders, the stronger their religiosity the more frequently they reported engaging as leaders. The reverse was generally the case for Muslim leaders. Respondents with weak religiosity reported engaging in the five leadership practices more frequently than those with moderate and strong religiosity scores, and this pattern reached statistical significance for Encourage. The null hypothesis is

Table I.
Comparison of the leadership practices of Christian and Muslim organizational leaders

	Rank	Christian <i>M</i>	SD	Rank	Muslim <i>M</i>	SD	
Model	3	48.3	7.2	2	42.5	7.4	***
Inspire	5	46.5	7.7	5	39.2	8.6	***
Challenge	4	47.6	7.7	3	39.6	8.3	***
Enable	1	50.7	7.3	1	43.4	7.3	***
Encourage	2	49.6	8.1	4	39.5	8.9	***
Overall LPI score		242.7	35.9		204.2	38.6	***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

consequently rejected for Christian leaders, as religiosity did influence their leadership practices, but accepted for Muslim leaders as the differences on this dimension were generally not statistically significant.

The third research question examined whether religious affiliation or religiosity had the greater influence on leadership practices. Multiple regression analyses were conducted with “transformational leadership” (overall LPI score) as the dependent variable and religious affiliation and religiosity as the independent variables. Together, religious affiliation and religiosity accounted for 21 percent of the explained variance in transformational leadership behaviors across the entire sample (results not shown). Using stepwise regression, religion entered the equation first, accounting for 20.1 percent of the variance, and religiosity accounted for another 0.9 percent ($\Delta R^2 = 0.008$, $p < 0.05$). The respondents’ religious affiliation demonstrated more impact on their leadership practices than did their level of religiosity.

8. Discussion

In this study, three research questions were addressed. The first looked at whether religious affiliation impacted how leaders reported behaving. Christian leaders reported engaging in all five leadership practices significantly more often than did their Muslim counterparts. The latter were less transformational as leaders and this tendency toward being more autocratic as leaders has been noted by others (Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001; Hofstede *et al.*, 2010; Jogulu, 2010). The behavior of Muslim organizational leaders may be affected by stricter adherence to Quranic principles whereby followers are encouraged to obey the will of those who are in authority (Ali, 1996; Barhem *et al.*, 2009). These findings may explain the conclusions Hofstede *et al.* (2010) reached about Lebanon’s culture being less collectivist than the other Arab

Table II.
Comparison of the
leadership practices
of weak, moderate,
and strong
religiosity for
Christian leaders

	Weak religiosity		Moderate religiosity		Strong religiosity		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Model	46.7	7.0	50.4	7.7	51.5	5.9	***
Inspire	44.8	7.2	49.1	8.4	49.1	7.1	**
Challenge	45.8	7.8	49.4	7.6	51.8	5.1	***
Enable	49.2	7.6	52.4	7.5	53.6	4.8	**
Encourage	47.7	8.2	51.9	8.4	53.1	5.5	***
Overall LPI score	234.1	35.4	253.2	38.0	259.1	26.0	***

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table III.
Comparison of the
leadership practices
of weak, moderate,
and strong
religiosity for
Muslim leaders

	Weak religiosity		Moderate religiosity		Strong religiosity		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Model	44.1	5.7	41.9	6.8	42.4	8.5	
Inspire	40.9	7.0	38.0	7.9	39.8	9.6	
Challenge	41.0	7.9	38.5	8.0	40.1	8.6	
Enable	45.6	6.6	42.6	6.6	43.3	8.0	
Encourage	43.1	8.6	37.8	8.7	39.8	8.8	**
Overall LPI score	214.6	32.8	198.7	36.9	205.4	41.7	

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

countries. Similarly, workplace dynamics in other Muslim-dominated countries, like Turkey, Qatar, Kuwait, Egypt, and Morocco, have also been found to be quite hierarchical (Kabasakal and Bodur, 2002).

The second research question examined how the strength of leaders' devotion to a religious faith would impact their leadership practices. The results were interesting because they revealed a pattern for Christian leaders that was different than the one for Muslim leaders. For Christian leaders, the stronger their faith (religiosity) the more frequently they engaged as leaders, while for Muslim leaders the opposite was true. The stronger their religiosity the less frequently they engaged as leaders. These findings underscore the obvious that these two religious traditions are not the same in their beliefs about how human behavior gets translated into the workplace and the proper relationships between those in authority and their followers (leaders and their constituents). They are in line with conclusions reached by Rashid and Ibrahim (2008) that Muslims have a higher level of religiosity than Christians (as well as Buddhists, Taoists, Confucians, and Hindus). Similarly, McCleary and Barro (2006) reported that Muslim countries exhibit higher levels of religiosity than other countries, and Ayyash-Abdo (2001) found that most Lebanese Muslims practice their religion to a greater degree than Lebanese Christians.

In light of these first two findings, the third research question asked whether religious affiliation and religiosity would be similarly impactful on leadership practices. The results showed that religious affiliation by itself accounted for just more than 20 percent of the variance in leadership practices, while religiosity by itself accounted for less than 1 percent of the variance in the overall sample. That religiosity did not explain leadership practices contradicts other studies such as Delbecq's (2010) who concluded that in a religiously pluralistic workforce, religiosity affected leadership practices in the workplace. The findings demonstrate that once religion is determined, religiosity appears to have little or no impact on how a person may behave as an organizational leader. This conclusion supports the assertions made by Rashid and Ibrahim (2008) that religion is a major influencer of beliefs and behaviors and that religion is an integral part of Lebanese people's personality and not necessarily an indicator of their religiosity (Ghandour *et al.*, 2009).

9. Conclusion

This study adds empirical evidence about a relationship between religious affiliation and leadership practices. The results are consistent with those showing that religion is a significant influencer of leadership; and that religious beliefs affect leadership style in how they influence the way people process information and make decisions (Sengupta, 2010; Yaghi, 2008). This study supports prior research showing that religion is an integral part of the Arab culture (Amer *et al.*, 2008) and is consistent with conclusions that a strong relationship exists between the religious convictions of Arab managers and how they interact with their subordinates (Al-Khatib *et al.*, 2002; Sidani and Thornberry, 2010). The study further supports assertions that for Muslims a significant influencer of interpersonal relations in the workplace is their religion (Metcalf, 2007; Tayeb, 1997).

However, the finding that religiosity played such a minor role in explaining leadership practices is troubling. How can it be that religious affiliation somehow influences leadership behavior but not the strength of one's adherence to the principals and standards of that faith? Is it possible that while religion captures an overall behavioral disposition, the depth of those convictions do not get directly played out in

the workplace? Can it be that workplace culture trumps the fervor of one's religious affiliation as people behave in the workplace? Of course, this is confusing because leaders of the Muslim faith did systematically vary from their Christian counterparts in terms of their leadership practices.

Clearly, future studies are needed to better understand these complex relationships. One place to start would be studying leaders of different religious affiliations within the same organization to understand the role organizational culture might play in dampening the impact of religious affiliation and/or religiosity. Likewise, it would be useful to know what other characteristics (such as age, gender, industry, and hierarchical level) could influence or moderate the impact of religious affiliation. Equally important would be to investigate the effectiveness of leaders, and determine if religious affiliation or religiosity contributed in any way (positive or negative). This "assessment" limitation in the current study makes the findings mostly descriptive, rather than prescriptive. Future research within the various sects of both Christianity and Islam may provide even greater insights into the relationships between religiosity and leadership.

Similarly, this study relied on self-reports of people about their leadership behaviors, and while there is no reason to suspect that this bias systematically varied between Christians and Muslims, having the viewpoint of constituents about their leader's behaviors would strengthen the argument. Along these lines, it would be interesting to know more about the religious affiliation of the leader's constituents and determining if leading Christian or Muslim constituents is more problematic, or moderated by the similarity of the religious affiliation of the leaders and their constituents. Given Lebanon's uniqueness in the Middle East, along with its special social and religious fabric, the findings in this paper may not be more generally applicable. Finally, there may be factors specific to the Lebanese workplace environment (including pertinent social and political factors) that may be conducive to some leadership behaviors and not others (Tessler, 2010).

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