

Employees open about religion in the workplace more satisfied

November 13 2014, by Brent Lyons

New research from Simon Fraser University's Beedie School of Business indicates that organizations could benefit by encouraging employees to talk about their religion in the workplace.

The study found employees who talk openly about their [religious beliefs](#) are more satisfied than those who hide it.

The paper, "Applying models of employee identity management across cultures: Christianity in the USA and South Korea," was published in the July 2014 edition of the Journal of Organizational Behavior.

It was co-authored by Brent Lyons, SFU's Beedie School of Business; Jennifer Wessel, University of Akron; Sonia Ghumman, University of Hawaii at Manoa; Ann Marie Ryan, Michigan State University; and Sooyeol Kim, Kansas State University.

The researchers gathered data from almost 500 people attending Christian churches in both the USA and South Korea.

The two countries were chosen specifically for their contrasting cultures – U.S. citizens are generally encouraged to express their individuality, while Koreans displayed more collectivism.

The research found that in both countries individuals who feel their workplace is generally supportive of diverse opinions and [beliefs](#) are more likely to openly talk about their religion, resulting in satisfied

employees.

Individuals who believed their organization was not supportive of diverse beliefs, however, were less likely to discuss their religion, and exhibited symptoms of dissatisfaction in the workplace.

The study also suggests organizations must be mindful of the implications of organizational culture when addressing religion.

"During the holiday season, if your organization makes a big deal about Christmas, for example, they could be sending the implicit message that they value Christian belief systems over other religions," says Lyons, a professor of management and organization studies.

"This may inadvertently lead individuals to hide aspects of themselves, which can lead to stress and reduce employee commitment. Organizations would benefit from ensuring that they are a safe place for the expression of multiple beliefs."

More information: Lyons, B., Wessel, J., Ghumman, S., Ryan, A. M. and Kim, S. (2014), "Applying models of employee identity management across cultures: Christianity in the USA and South Korea." *J. Organiz. Behav.*, 35: 678–704. doi: 10.1002/job.1917

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