

Study finds that employees who are open about religion are happier

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It may be beneficial for employers to not only encourage office Christmas parties but also celebrate holidays and festivals from a variety of religions, according to a Kansas State University researcher.

Sooyeol Kim, doctoral student in psychological sciences, was involved in a collaborative study that found that employees who openly discuss their religious beliefs at work are often happier and have higher job satisfaction than those employees who do not.

"For many people, [religion](#) is the core of their lives," Kim said. "Being able to express important aspects of one's life can influence work-related issues, such as job satisfaction, work performance or engagement. It can be beneficial for organizations to have a climate that is welcoming to every religion and culture."

Kim said employers might even want to consider a religion-friendly policy or find ways to encourage religious expression. For example, organizations could have an office Christmas party, but also could celebrate and recognize other religious holidays and dates, such as Hanukkah, Ramadan or Buddhist holidays.

Kim has studied organizational psychology and is a co-author on a *Journal of Organizational Behavior* article, "Applying models of employee identity management across cultures: Christianity in the USA and South Korea."

Other co-authors on the study include Brent Lyons, assistant professor of management and organization studies at Simon Fraser University; Jennifer Wessel, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Maryland; Sonia Ghumman, assistant professor of management at the University of Hawaii, Manoa; and Ann Marie Ryan, professor of psychology at Michigan State University.

For the cross-cultural study, the researchers surveyed nearly 600 working adults from a variety of industries—including education and finance—in the U.S. and South Korea. The surveyed employees were all Christian, but identified with a variety of denominations, including Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist, among others.

The researchers asked participants how important religion was to them and how it helped to shape their identity.

Results showed that employees who valued religion as a core part of their lives were more likely to disclose their religion in the workplace. Employees who felt pressure to assimilate in the workplace were less likely to disclose their religious identity, Kim said.

But most significantly, the researchers found that the employees who disclosed their religion in the workplace had several positive outcomes, including higher [job satisfaction](#) and higher perceived well-being.

"Disclosing your religion can be beneficial for employees and individual well-being," Kim said. "When you try to hide your identity, you have to pretend or you have to lie to others, which can be stressful and negatively impact how you build relationships with co-workers."

Kim said there are several ways employees can share their religion in the workplace. Employees might decorate their desk with a religious object, such as a cross or a calendar. They also may share stories or information

about their [religious beliefs](#) during conversation, such as describing a church-related event.

The researchers found no major differences between the U.S. and Korean samples. They also found no major differences between industries, but Kim said that an organization's culture also might play a role in determining if employees disclose their religion.

Kim said the research on religion in the workplace plays a part into work-life balance. Research continues to show that individual characteristics—such as family and religion—can influence work-related issues.

"People can bring nonworking issues into the workplace or they may bring a work issue into their nonworking domain," Kim said. "Now days that boundary is blurred and there are less clear distinctions between work and personal life."

Provided by Kansas State University

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