

Are Good Citizens Religious?

Exploring the Link between Organizational Citizenship Behaviours and Religious Beliefs

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Abstract

Several influential studies have found religion to be an important determinant of human behavior and organizational behaviors. Research (e.g. Ntalianis & Raja 2002) along this line has suggested a direct association between religious affiliations and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB). Yet, no study has tested this relationship directly. This study was designed to empirically examine this relationship. It thus investigated the possible influence of religious beliefs on citizenship behaviours. Ghanaian industrial workers affiliated with three main religious groups, Christianity, Islam, and Traditional African Religion, were asked to rate their participation in organizational citizenship activities, and their responses were compared. T-test, ANOVA and MANOVA were employed in the analyses. Mean scores for all three groups were rather high, indicating active participation by all three religious groups. Preliminary analyses showed Christian workers to have relatively active participation in OCBs. Further analyses, however, ascribed this difference to the effect of higher education and the concomitant socioeconomic factors prevalent among the workers affiliated with Christianity. The general observation was that religious beliefs tend to influence workers to act in accordance with the ethical teachings of their religions.

Introduction

Religious beliefs and organizational behaviours

Fem (1963: 647) in *An Encyclopedia of Religion* defines religion, as we would also do, as “a set of behaviours or meanings which are connected to the actions of a religious person.” Religion is such an integral part of life and culture that the essential role it plays in the human meaning system has inspired researchers to investigate the potential relationship between various forms of religiosity and social behaviour. Empirical studies in psychology and sociology of religion have revealed important links between people’s socio-religious beliefs and their behaviour. This relationship has intrigued both earlier (e.g. Allport 1953; Durkheim 1951) and contemporary researchers (e.g. Emmos & Paloutzian 2003; Ntalianis & Darr 2005; Tiliopoulos et al. 2007). Of late, religious diversity in workplaces has made religiosity an attractive field for organizational research. Several studies have systematically tried to investigate the underlying dynamics of religiosity in organizational behaviours. In accident and safety literature, workers’ religiosity was found to be closely associated with risk taking behaviours (Kouabenan 1998; Peltzer & Renner 2003), causality and responsibility attributions for industrial accidents (Gyekye 2001; Gyekye & Salminen 2007), traffic accidents (Peltzer & Renner 2003), and accident frequency (Holcom et al. 1993). By contrast, other findings (e.g. Batson et al. 1993; Hood et al. 1996; Kumza et al. 1973) did not indicate any association between religiosity and organizational behaviours. For example, Kumza and his associates (1973) found that religion was not a significant factor in traffic violations and accidents. Thus the impact of workers’ religiosity or organizational behaviour is less clear.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviours (OCB)

Interest in citizenship behaviours originated from the field of organizational behaviour but has expanded to other disciplines such as human resource management, international business, industrial and labour relations, strategic management, and community psychology. The literature presents organizational citizenship behaviours as discretionary behaviours that go beyond those formally prescribed by the organization and for which there are no direct rewards (e.g. Podsakoff et al. 2000; Organ 1988, 1994). To quote Organ (1988: 4), the chief architect of this theory, organizational citizenship behaviours are “individual behaviours that are discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognised by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promote the effective functioning of the organization. By discretionary, we mean that the behaviour is not an enforceable requirement of the role or the job description, that is, the clearly specifiable terms of the person’s employment contract with the organization; the behaviour is rather a matter of personal choice, such that its omission is not generally understood as punishable”. OCBs include volunteering to replace a sick co-worker, volunteering

for tasks that are not assigned, providing innovative ideas to improve operations, obedience, loyalty, organizational courtesy, following rules conscientiously, presenting the organization favourably to outsiders, and assisting co-workers and or supervisors with job-related assignments. These organizational activities have been described as spontaneous, co-operative, and as actions taken to enhance organizational image at no reward from management. Workers who engage in such altruistic and helpful behaviours for the advancement of their organizations have been designated as *good citizens* or *good soldiers* (Organ 1988; Kidder & Parks 2001; Turnispeed 2002). The underlying assumption is that such workers are not only efficient and productive, but also moral, upright, and virtuous.

Considerable research on OCB has documented the vital and crucial contributions *good citizens* make to their organizations. According to the research records, *good citizens* tend to encourage co-worker commitment (e.g. Cohen 2006), productivity, and efficient operation of employee participation programmes (Graham 1991), promote high-quality leadership and better quality services to customers (Bell & Menguc 2002; Hui et al. 2001), and increase the stability and ability of organizations to attract and retain effective employees (Podsakoff et al. 2000). Recently, Gyekye and Salminen (2005) observed that relative to their passive counterparts, workers active in citizenship behaviours tend to comply with their organization’s safety management procedures, register relatively lower accident involvement rates, and consequently reduce the human and financial cost that accompany industrial accidents.

A close look at the main components of organizational citizenship behaviours—obedience, loyalty and participation—reveals a religious connotation. The sacrifice, spirit of volunteerism, and altruism involved in OCBs suggest that citizenship activities may constitute a value-based phenomenon linked to an individual’s religion. The possibility thus exists that below the surface of participation in citizenship activities we might find the undercurrent of the worker’s religious orientations. It has been established that workers who follow the tenets of their religion are more likely to demonstrate acceptable organizational behaviours (Ntalianis & Raja 2002; Ntalianis & Darr 2005; Tiliopoulos et al. 2007). Ntalianis and Raja’s (2002) argumentation that Christian, Jewish and Muslim workers are likely to exhibit higher levels of extra-role behaviours (citizenship behaviours) and will not hesitate to blow the whistle on illegitimate practices to protect their organizations gives credence to this viewpoint. Despite the theoretical support for such prediction, empirical evidence is lacking. In the spirit of contributing to further studies on religion and organizational behaviours, this study empirically investigated the relationship between religious affiliations and participation in citizenship activities.

Proposition

Given the absence of empirical evidence and sufficient theoretical basis to suggest

an association between religious beliefs and citizenship behaviours, this relation is tested but no hypothesis is offered regarding its direction.

The Current Study

The current study examined the citizenship activities of workers affiliated with the three main religious groups in Ghana: Christianity, Islam and Traditional African Religion. Our examination of religiosity among Ghanaian workers is of special relevance due to the high levels of religious involvement and the great symbolic significance that religious institutions have in Ghana. Ghana Statistical Services put Christians at 67%, Islam at 18%, Traditionalists at 10%, and people of other and no religions at 5% in 2000. The major instrument in the current study was Van Dyne, Graham & Dienesch's (1994) Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) scale. It was employed because it contains a greater number of items than the other measures, thus affording a more comprehensive range of behaviours to assess for citizenship behaviours. The current study employed a self-report assessment. The advantage of this is that workers know better than anyone else the degree of their participation in citizenship activities. The decision to use the structured questionnaire of van Dyne et al.'s (1994) scale that require personal knowledge of the individual rather than occasional observation, made self-appraisal of citizenship behaviours the appropriate method for evaluation.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The participants were 308 Ghanaian industrial workers who possessed the following characteristics: 65% (n = 200) were male, and 35% (n = 108) female. Subordinate workers made up 75% (n = 231) and supervisors 25% (n = 77). A total of 42% (n = 130) of the participants were married and 58% (n = 178) were unmarried. Christians comprised 66% (n = 203), Muslims 22% (n = 68), Traditionalists 9% (n = 28) and workers affiliated with other religious groups such as Buddhism, Shintoism, and Hinduism 3% (n = 9). The educational background of the participants was as follows: 50% (n = 159) had basic education, 30% (n = 98) had secondary education, 17% (n = 56) had professional education, and 3% (n = 7) university education.

A structured questionnaire was used in the assessment. The participants completed the questionnaire during lunch breaks. It was presented in English, and when respondents with lower literacy skills had problems understanding English, the services of an interpreter were sought and the local language was used. The duration varied from 15 to 20 minutes, depending on the context in which they were conducted, and on the respondent's level of education. The supervisors were proficient and filled in the questionnaire on their own. To ensure accuracy of responses, participants

were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. They were also informed that no member of their organizations was involved in the study in any way.

Measures, Questionnaire Scoring and Reliability

Citizenship behaviours

Citizenship behaviours were measured with an adapted version of the scale by Van Dyne et al. (1994). A total of 20 items with respectable loadings out of their 54-item scale were employed. They consisted of 6, 7 and 7 items each on obedience, loyalty and participation respectively. Each of these three categories included items that describe specific behaviour relevant to each category: obedience (sample item: "Always on time at work, regardless of circumstances": $\alpha = .76$); loyalty (sample item: "Volunteers for overtime work when needed": $\alpha = .92$), and participation (sample item: "Searches for new ideas to improve operations": $\alpha = .92$). The total coefficient alpha score was .92. Participants responded on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = very much. Past research has shown this scale to have good psychometric properties, and it has been used extensively in research on citizenship behaviours (e.g. Gyekye & Salminen 2005; Turnipseed 2002).

Religious affiliation

Participants were requested to mark the option that corresponded to their religious affiliation. Response options were: (a) Christian, (b) Muslim, (c) Traditional African Religion, and (d) Other.

Data Analysis and Results

Three sets of statistical analyses were performed. The first analysis investigated the degree of active and passive citizenship participants in the various religious groups. A median-split (Table 1) on participations in citizenship activities indicated that Christian workers were more active in citizenship behaviours than workers of the other religious groups ($\chi^2 = 14.87$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 1 Organizational Citizenship Behaviours by Religion

OCB	Religious Groups			
	Christians (n=153) %	Muslims (n=65) %	Traditional (n=62) %	Others (n=28) %
Lower than median	40	58	58	71
Higher than median	60	42	42	29
Total	100	100	100	100

($\div 2 = 14.87$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.01$).

One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed significant differences in three items on the “obedience” sub-scale (see Table 2 in Appendix). These items were *always on time at work* ($F(3, 303) = 3.63, p < 0.05$), *extremely careful with rules* ($F(3, 303) = 4.79, p < 0.01$) and *gives my very best* ($F(3, 302) = 3.72, p < 0.05$). Post hoc analysis with *t*-test indicated that Christians were significantly more often on time ($t = 3.29, df = 305, p < 0.01$), more careful with rules ($t = 3.58, df = 305, p < 0.001$) and gave their very best even when exhausted ($t = 3.32, df = 304, p < 0.01$).

There were five significant differences on the “loyalty” sub-scale. These were noted on the following items: *guided by professional standards* ($F(3, 300) = 5.62, p < 0.001$), *represents organisation favourably to outsiders* ($F(3, 300) = 3.88, p < 0.01$), *promotes organization products* ($F(3, 300) = 5.95, p < 0.001$), *involved in outside groups that benefits the organization* ($F(3, 300) = 4.30, p < 0.01$), and *volunteers for overtime* ($F(3, 300) = 2.80, p < 0.05$). Post hoc analysis confirmed that Christians had higher values in all these five comparisons: *guided* ($t = 3.94, df = 302, p < 0.001$), *represents* ($t = 3.36, df = 302, p < 0.001$), *promotes* ($t = 4.18, df = 302, p < 0.001$), *involved* ($t = 3.40, df = 302, p < 0.001$), and *volunteers* ($t = 2.88, df = 302, p < 0.01$).

Significant differences between religious groups were found in all seven items on the “participation” subscale. These were *helps co-workers with assignments* ($F(3, 300) = 4.86, p < 0.01$), *keeps abreast with changes in the organization* ($F(3, 300) = 3.76, p < 0.05$), *informs supervisors when things are going wrong* ($F(3, 300) = 3.74, p < 0.05$), *expresses opinions honestly even if others disagree* ($F(3, 300) = 3.14, p < 0.05$), *searches for new ideas* ($F(3, 300) = 3.65, p < 0.05$), *offers creative suggestions to co-workers* ($F(3, 300) = 3.21, p < 0.05$), and *helps co-workers with job-related problems* ($F(3, 300) = 5.81, p < 0.001$). Again, workers affiliated with the Christian faith scored highest on these items in the post-hoc analysis: *helps assignment* ($t = 3.50, df = 302, p < 0.001$), *keeps abreast* ($t = 3.24, df = 302, p < 0.01$), *informs supervisors* ($t = 2.99, df = 302, p < 0.01$), *expresses opinions* ($t = 3.02, df = 302, p < 0.01$), *searches* ($t = 3.28, df = 302, p < 0.01$), *offers suggestions* ($t = 2.89, df = 302, p < 0.01$), and *helps with job-related problems* ($t = 3.84, df = 302, p < 0.001$).

As reflected in Table 3 (see Appendix), differences in the sum variables were not of statistical significance ($F(3, 302) = 5.43, ns$), but had rather high mean scores for all various religious groups.

The final analysis involved a multivariate analysis (MANOVA). Ghanaian religious sociologists (e.g. Addai 2000; Takyi & Addai 2002) have noted the influence that education has on followers of these religious groups. Chi-square analysis confirmed that workers affiliated with Christianity were the most highly educated ($\chi^2 = 40.40, df = 2, p < 0.001$), and as a result, tend to more often hold supervisory and management positions. Because educational level and job role are strongly interrelated, as shown by status-attainment models (e.g. Blau 1964), it was necessary to estimate the impact of religion in a multivariate analysis. Results from the MANOVA indicated a highly significant effect on the “obedience” subscale (F

(12, 273) = 15.44, $p < 0.001$). However, the interaction model (Religion x education x job role) was not significant ($F(3, 273) = 0.33, ns$), but the main effects of religion ($F(3, 273) = 4.47, p < 0.01$) and education ($F(1, 273) = 166.11, p < 0.001$) were significant. On “loyalty,” the multi-way analysis of variance was highly significant ($F(12, 274) = 24.45, p < 0.001$). The interaction model (Religion x education x job role) was not significant ($F(3, 274) = 0.59, ns$), but the main effect of religion ($F(3, 274) = 9.15, p < 0.001$) and education ($F(1, 274) = 25.83, p < 0.001$) were significant. The MANOVA was highly significant for “participation” ($F(12, 274) = 16.82, p < 0.001$). Only the main effects of religion ($F(3, 274) = 7.62, p < 0.001$) and education ($F(1, 274) = 171.76, p < 0.001$) were highly significant. Other interaction effects were not significant. In all these analyses, workers affiliated with Christianity had higher values than their counterparts in the other religion groups.

The multi-way analysis of variance was highly significant for Organizational Citizenship Behaviour ($F(12, 273) = 22.73, p < 0.001$). However, the interaction model (religion x education x job role) was not significant for organizational citizenship behaviour ($F(3, 273) = 0.54, ns$). The main effects of religion ($F(3, 273) = 8.77, p < 0.001$) and education ($F(1, 273) = 238.63, p < 0.001$) were highly significant. Thus Christians, who had the highest education, also had the highest values regarding citizenship behaviours.

Discussion

The present study is among the relatively few empirical studies concerning religiosity and organizational behaviour. The primary purpose was to explore the probable impact of workers’ religious beliefs on organizational citizenship behaviours. The preliminary results, which designated workers affiliated with Christianity as being more active in citizenship behaviours, could be reasonably explained by the fact that most of the Christian workers were relatively highly educated, occupied prestigious positions as middle management staff, supervisors, unit leaders who had privileges and access to amenities that were denied their subordinates. Hence, they had been more motivated and inspired to engage in citizenship behaviours to reciprocate¹ (Gyeyke & Salminen 2005; Eisenberger et al. 2001). Such reciprocals are basically conscious, ethically motivated acts, specifically performed to show appreciation to the employer for providing a satisfying work environment (Turnipseed 2001; Weaver & Agle 2002).

As reflected in the results, all the workers in the various religious groups had identical and notably high mean scores regarding participation in citizenship activities: an indication of their enthusiastic participation in OCBs. Generally, there seems to be a clear sense of obligation, commitment and dedication – a clear common element of demanded behaviour where religion seems to have provided the motive for the extra-role behaviours. The high mean scores that remained

consistent across the religious groups in Tables 2 and 3 further strengthens this conclusion. Ostensibly, the workers had used religion as the governing standard for their organizational behaviours. Given that religious doctrines tend to influence considerably devotees' behaviour (e.g. Allport 1953; Tiliopoulos et al. 2007), it is our contention that the current observation is a reflection of the underlying tenets of these religious groups. A close look at these religious groups reveals that they seem to have identical religiously-based views on work. Work-related values among Christians (the Protestant Work Ethic) (Weber 1930), Muslims (the Islamic Work Ethic) (Ali 1992; Yousef 2001), and Traditionalists (Gyekye 1996) tend to emphasize hard work, integrity, responsibility, fairness, accountability, commitment and dedication. These religions aim at instilling in their followers moral behaviour, self control, obedience to authority, and moral commitment to work. Consequently, adherents who hold and follow such religious ideals would be inspired to show positive work attitudes such as co-operation and loyalty, obedience, commitment and dedication to their organizations.

Additionally, research on religiosity has often described religious people as helpful, loyal, honest and polite (Rokeach 1969), with a concern for security, harmony, stability in relationships, and a desire to downplay their desires and sacrifice for other's well-being (e.g. Rokeach 1969; Schwartz & Huisman 1995). Additionally, they have been noted to be conscientious, assiduous (Saraglou et al. 2004), and law abiding (Levy 1986). Ostensibly, workers with strong religious convictions have considered work as a vocation and, ultimately, an explicit part of their religious role identity (Davidson & Caddel 1994; Snir & Harpaz 2004). They had been guided by their religious commitments that made them view dedication and commitment to extra-role work activities as a virtue. The current observations might also depict the high intrinsic religious orientation of Ghanaians. Ghanaian researchers (e.g. Gyekye 1996; Takyi & Addai 2002) have found religion to be an integral part of the Ghanaian life and culture, and considered it as a significant predictor of behaviour change. Belief in God, Allah, or gods is thus widespread, with many people often deferring to or using theology in their interpretations of social reality.

It is thus not uncommon in Ghanaian workplaces to hear workers cite their Christian/Islamic/Traditionalists convictions among other reasons for behaving in certain ways. Apparently, across the various religious traditions under study, there appears to be much in common as to how religious beliefs act as a basis for ethical decision making at the workplace (Weaver & Agle 2002). The overall findings are thus consistent with the notion that followers of religious tenets tend to exhibit pro-organizational behaviours, such as obedience to authority, honesty, loyalty, humility, helpful behaviour (Ellis & Peterson 1996; Ntalianis & Raja 2002), and limited antisocial behaviour (e.g. Levy 1986; Ntalianis & Raja 2002). Specifically, it provides strong empirical support for Ntalianis & Raja's (2002) argumentation of a link between citizenship activities and workers' religiosity.

Limitations

The major limitation of this study was the use of self-reported measures. The possibility thus exists for the respondents to falsely report active participation as a result of general interest in providing socially desirable responses. To counter this threat, participants were promised anonymity, and were informed that the study was strictly meant for an academic purpose and that no member of their organizations was involved in it in any way. Recent meta-analytic research by Crampton and Wagner (1994) indicates that while this problem continues to be cited regularly, the magnitude of distortions may be overestimated. Self-reported measures have been recommended and commonly used in citizenship evaluations (e.g. Turnipseed 2002). These caveats aside, the current study has demonstrated the strong role religious beliefs play in the extent to which individuals carry out pro-social behaviours that benefit organizations. Further analyses between religious workers and non-religious or less-religious workers would promote better understanding of the area.

Notes

- ¹ According to the Social Exchange Theory (Blau 1964) and the Reciprocity Theory (Gouldner 1960), workers who are content with job conditions and perceive a high level of organizational support have felt a sense of indebtedness and a need to reciprocate in terms that benefit their organizations. Such reciprocals include pro-social organizational behaviours and active participation in extra-role activities.

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Table 2
Appendix

Descriptive Statistics on Organizational Citizenship Behaviour by Religion

Variables	Christians (n = 153)		Muslims (n = 65)		Traditionalists (n = 62)		Others (n=28)		p-values
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Obedience									
<i>F</i> (3, 303) = 3.57, ns									
1. Always on time at work, regardless of circumstances	3.85	0.84	3.51	0.89	3.52	0.92	3.57	0.79	<.05
2. Extremely careful with company's rules and regulations	3.81	1.11	3.35	1.23	3.46	1.06	3.14	0.89	<.01
3. Gives very best even when exhausted	3.68	1.15	3.29	1.27	3.20	1.15	3.21	0.96	<.05
4. Endeavours to meet all deadlines set by management	3.54	1.24	3.35	1.26	3.36	1.14	3.14	1.33	ns
5. Wastes organizational resources	2.10	1.26	2.11	1.06	2.25	1.11	2.18	0.98	ns
6. Anticipates and solves problems before hand	3.54	1.12	3.22	1.12	3.17	1.32	3.25	1.14	ns
Loyalty									
<i>F</i> (3, 303) = 5.31, ns									
7. Guided by high professional standards	4.06	1.04	3.67	1.02	3.55	1.20	3.39	1.13	<.001
8. Represents organization favourably to outsiders	3.55	1.13	3.05	1.30	3.17	1.17	3.04	1.17	<.01
9. Promotes organization's products and services	3.57	1.20	3.05	1.37	2.95	1.17	2.86	1.38	<.001
10. Involved in outside groups that benefit the organization	3.46	1.26	3.05	1.41	2.80	1.19	3.07	1.49	<.01
11. Volunteers for overtime work when needed	4.08	1.12	3.63	1.28	3.72	1.46	3.68	1.25	<.05
12. Maintains confidentiality of information	3.79	1.21	3.42	1.27	3.40	1.38	3.39	1.45	ns
13. Defends organization when it is being criticized	3.68	1.35	3.28	1.27	3.32	1.24	3.32	1.47	ns
Participation									
<i>F</i> (3, 303) = 5.27, ns									
14. Helps co-workers with their assignments	4.36	0.94	4.05	1.09	3.92	1.21	3.68	1.28	<.01
15. Keeps abreast with changes in the organization	3.81	1.09	3.39	1.26	3.45	1.10	3.21	1.34	<.05
16. Informs supervisor when things are going wrong	3.77	1.15	3.52	1.35	3.18	1.40	3.25	1.38	<.05
17. Expresses opinions honestly even if others disagree	3.64	1.20	3.27	1.39	3.13	1.33	3.18	1.44	<.05
18. Searches for new ideas to improve operations	3.63	1.27	3.11	1.44	3.10	1.41	3.25	1.27	<.05
19. Offers creative suggestions to co-workers	3.94	1.21	3.38	1.39	3.60	1.40	3.64	1.25	<.05
20. Helps co-workers with job related problems	4.30	1.07	3.94	1.28	3.65	1.48	3.54	1.53	<.001

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics on Total Sum Variables (OCB) and Religious Groups

	Christians			Muslims			Traditionalists			Other-religion			p ^{<}
	N	M	Std	N	M	Std	N	M	Std	N	M	Std	
A. Obedience	153	20.49	3.37	65	18.92	4.76	60	18.83	4.75	28	18.50	4.19	ns
B. Loyalty	153	26.19	6.81	65	23.14	7.46	61	22.90	6.83	28	22.75	7.77	ns
C. Participation	153	27.45	6.53	65	24.64	7.52	61	24.03	7.75	28	23.75	8.04	ns
Total	153	74.14	16.97	65	66.70	18.80	61	65.51	18.44	28	65.00	19.05	ns

$f(3, 302) = 5.43, ns$

ns = not of statistical significance