



Workplace practices supporting spirituality: Perceptions across multi-religious and multi- generational cohorts

Scott Foster, Ben George, Jyoti Kukreja & Anna Foster

To cite this article: Scott Foster, Ben George, Jyoti Kukreja & Anna Foster (12 Oct 2026): Workplace practices supporting spirituality: Perceptions across multi-religious and multi-generational cohorts, Journal for the Study of Spirituality, DOI: [10.1080/20440243.2026.2728710](https://doi.org/10.1080/20440243.2026.2728710)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20440243.2026.2728710>



© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 12 Oct 2026.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Workplace practices supporting spirituality: Perceptions across multi-religious and multi-generational cohorts

Scott Foster ^a, Ben George ^a, Jyoti Kukreja ^b and Anna Foster ^c

^aLiverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK; ^bNew Delhi Institute of Management, New Delhi, India; ^cChester School of Education, University of Chester, Chester, UK

ABSTRACT

The expression of religious identity at work remains an important but underexamined issue in contemporary organisations, especially in diverse workplaces where employees may differ in how confidently they express religion or belief and how they perceive organisational support. This study addresses that gap using survey data from 385 employees across 55 stores of a large retail organisation in the United Kingdom. It examined whether perceptions of organisational support differed across religious groups and generational cohorts, the extent to which employees were aware of relevant organisational policies, and how they reported they would respond when organisational expectations appeared to conflict with personal beliefs. The findings suggest that perceptions of support were uneven. Muslim employees reported the lowest levels of perceived organisational support, Christian employees reported more moderate levels, and employees in the Other category reported the highest levels of perceived inclusivity. Generational differences were also evident, while policy awareness remained consistently low. The study contributes United Kingdom evidence and highlights the importance of clear policy communication, consistent implementation, and sensitivity to differences across religious and generational groups in current workplace practice.

KEYWORDS

Expression of religious identity; religion and belief; organisational support; generational differences; policy awareness; workplace diversity

Introduction

The expression of religious identity at work remains an important but underexamined issue in contemporary organisations. In the United Kingdom, religion and belief are protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, yet employees' experiences of expressing religious identity at work appear to vary depending on organisational context, managerial practice, and the visibility of relevant policies (Equality Act 2010; Mitchell et al. 2015). Prior research suggests that employees may differ in how confident they feel about expressing religious beliefs, requesting accommodation, or raising concerns

CONTACT Scott Foster  S.Foster@ljmu.ac.uk  Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, L3 5UG, UK

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

when organisational expectations appear to conflict with personal convictions (Mitchell et al. 2015; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001). These issues are especially significant in diverse workplaces, where employees from different faith backgrounds may not experience organisational support in the same way (Forstenlechner and Al Waqfi 2010; Mabey et al. 2017).

Although the literature on workplace spirituality is relevant to these discussions, spirituality and religious identity should not be treated as synonymous. Workplace spirituality is commonly used to refer to broad questions of meaning, purpose, community, and value alignment in work, whereas the expression of religious identity at work relates more specifically to the way employees understand, disclose, and practise beliefs associated with a recognised faith or belief position (Ashmos and Duchon 2000; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone 2004). In practice, these areas may overlap for some employees, but they raise different conceptual and policy issues, particularly when religion and belief are considered as protected characteristics rather than as broad questions of personal meaning (Mitchell et al. 2015; Snyder and Lopez 2001). This study therefore focuses specifically on employees' perceptions of support for the expression of religious identity at work, rather than on workplace spirituality as a general construct (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005).

This distinction matters because religion and belief at work are not simply questions of personal meaning; they also involve visible practices, organisational responses, and perceptions of fairness. Employees may seek support in relation to prayer, religious dress, dietary requirements, religious observance, or the expression of values grounded in faith (ACAS 2014; Mitchell et al. 2015). Where policy guidance is unclear or poorly communicated, employees may rely on personal judgement or line-manager discretion, which can create inconsistency across teams and locations (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005). Existing research in the United Kingdom similarly suggests that religion and belief are often treated as private matters in workplaces, creating uncertainty about what support is available and whether employees feel able to express their religious identity openly and confidently (Morgan 2005; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001).

A further issue concerns whether these experiences differ across employee groups. Earlier studies suggest that employees from different religious backgrounds may have different expectations of workplace accommodation and recognition, particularly where practices are more visible or require specific organisational adjustment (Forstenlechner and Al Waqfi 2010; Mabey et al. 2017). Generational cohort may also shape expectations, particularly where younger employees place greater emphasis on authenticity, meaning, and alignment between personal and organisational values (Kumar 2014; Lancaster and Stillman 2003; Twenge, Campbell, and Hoffman 2015). However, there remains limited quantitative evidence examining whether perceptions of support for the expression of religious identity at work differ across religious groups and generations within a single organisational setting (Benson and Brown 2011; Parry and Urwin 2011).

This study addresses these gaps using survey data from 385 employees across 55 stores of a large retail organisation in the United Kingdom. It examines three related questions. First, do employees from different religious groups differ in their perceptions of organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work? Second, do these perceptions vary across generational cohorts? Third, to what extent are employees aware of relevant organisational policies, and how do they report they would respond when

organisational values conflict with their own beliefs? By focusing on employee perceptions rather than assuming that policy provisions are well understood or consistently enacted, the study offers empirical insight into how religion and belief are experienced in everyday organisational life (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005).

The paper contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it provides quantitative evidence from a United Kingdom workplace context, where research on religion and belief at work remains relatively limited (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005). Second, it compares perceptions across religious and generational groups, thereby highlighting potential differences in how organisational support is experienced (Benson and Brown 2011; Forstenlechner and Al Waqfi 2010). Third, it considers policy awareness as an important part of employees' experience, recognising that formal policy and lived organisational practice may not always align (Mitchell et al. 2015; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001).

Literature review

Religion and belief at work

The expression of religion and belief at work has become an increasingly important issue in organisational research and practice, particularly in diverse workplaces where employees bring different beliefs, values, and expectations into the employment relationship (Mitchell et al. 2015; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001). In the United Kingdom context, religion and belief have legal significance as protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, but they also raise broader organisational questions about inclusion, fairness, managerial discretion, and employee confidence in expressing identity at work (ACAS 2014; Equality Act 2010). Existing research suggests that employees do not experience organisational support for religion and belief uniformly; rather, experiences are shaped by occupational setting, organisational norms, and the extent to which policies are communicated and enacted in practice (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005).

The literature also shows that religion and belief in the workplace are often treated cautiously. In many organisations, such matters are regarded as private or potentially sensitive, which can discourage explicit discussion and leave employees uncertain about what forms of expression are recognised as legitimate (Greenwald 2012; Morgan 2005). This is particularly relevant where organisational policy refers to equality and diversity in broad terms but provides limited practical guidance on how religion or belief should be addressed in everyday work settings (ACAS 2014; Mitchell et al. 2015).

Distinguishing workplace spirituality from the expression of religious identity

Although the literature on workplace spirituality is relevant to this discussion, it is important to distinguish it from the expression of religious identity at work. Workplace spirituality typically refers to broader questions of meaning, purpose, connection, authenticity, and value alignment in working life (Ashmos and Duchon 2000; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone 2004; Mhatre and Mehta 2023). By contrast, the expression of religious identity concerns the ways in which employees understand, disclose, and practise beliefs associated with a recognised faith or belief position. This may include requests relating to prayer, dress, fasting, diet, religious observance, or the expression of values

grounded in faith traditions (ACAS 2014; Mitchell et al. 2015; Snyder and Lopez 2001). While spirituality and religion may overlap for some employees, they are not synonymous constructs and they raise different conceptual and policy issues (Kourie 2007; Sargeant and Yoxall 2023).

This distinction is important because the workplace spirituality literature is both conceptually broad and empirically contested. Prior studies have associated spirituality with outcomes such as meaningful work, commitment, satisfaction, and ethical behaviour, but definitions remain varied and the field lacks a single agreed conceptual framework (Karakas 2010; Mhatre and Mehta 2023; Saks 2011). For the purposes of the present study, spirituality is therefore treated as adjacent background rather than as the primary focus. The study is concerned more specifically with employees' perceptions of organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work, which is more closely aligned with the organisational and policy-related issues raised by religion and belief in employment settings (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005).

Organisational context, policy, and employee perceptions

A recurring theme in the literature is that the experience of religion and belief at work is shaped not only by individual identity but also by organisational context. Employees interpret workplace support through everyday interactions, managerial responses, informal norms, and the visibility of relevant policies (Greenwald 2012; Mitchell et al. 2015). Even where organisations have equality and diversity policies in place, employees may remain unclear about whether such policies apply to religion or belief in practical terms. This can create uncertainty about what support is available and whether concerns can be raised safely and consistently (ACAS 2014; Mitchell et al. 2015).

Previous studies suggest that policy awareness is a particularly important issue. If employees do not know where relevant policies are located, do not understand how they apply, or perceive them as vague and general, they may rely instead on informal guidance from line managers or on personal judgement (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005). This increases the likelihood of inconsistent treatment across teams and locations. Research on religion and belief in United Kingdom workplaces has similarly suggested that organisations often address these matters indirectly through broad equality language rather than through clear and operational guidance (Mitchell et al. 2015; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001).

It is also important to distinguish between the existence of policy and employees' perceptions of policy. Employees may report low awareness or limited confidence in organisational support even where formal policy provisions exist. For this reason, employee perceptions represent a useful focus of study: they do not provide a direct audit of policy quality, but they do offer insight into how organisational arrangements are experienced in practice (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005).

Religious group differences in workplace experience

The literature suggests that employees from different religious backgrounds may experience workplace support in different ways. The organisational significance of religion is not the same for all groups, as expectations and needs may differ depending on patterns

of worship, forms of observance, visible markers of identity, and broader social perceptions (Forstenlechner and Al Waqfi 2010; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001). Earlier studies indicate that some employees may interpret organisational support in relatively general terms, while others may require more specific accommodation in relation to prayer, fasting, dress, dietary practice, or religious observance (ACAS 2014; Mitchell et al. 2015). This means that broad organisational statements about inclusion may not be experienced equally across faith groups (Forstenlechner and Al Waqfi 2010; Mabey et al. 2017).

Research has also shown that employees whose faith identity is more visible or more likely to require practical accommodation may be especially sensitive to ambiguity in policy or inconsistency in managerial response (Forstenlechner and Al Waqfi 2010; Mitchell et al. 2015). In contrast, employees whose beliefs are less visible or more easily absorbed into existing organisational norms may perceive the workplace as more flexible or inclusive (Greenwald 2012; Morgan 2005). Such differences are important because they suggest that religion and belief at work should not be treated as a uniform category. Instead, employee perceptions of support are likely to vary across religious groups, making group comparison a relevant part of empirical analysis (Mitchell et al. 2015; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001).

Generational differences and employee expectations

Generational cohort represents a further dimension that may shape how employees interpret organisational support for religion and belief. Previous studies on work values suggest that younger employees are often more likely to seek authenticity, purpose, and alignment between personal and organisational values, whereas older cohorts may be more accustomed to stronger boundaries between personal identity and professional role (Kumar 2014; Lancaster and Stillman 2003; Twenge, Campbell, and Hoffman 2015). Although this literature has not always focused specifically on religion or belief, it raises the possibility that employees from different generations may differ in what they expect from the organisation and in how they respond to value-related tensions at work (Benson and Brown 2011; Parry and Urwin 2011).

Millennials have frequently been associated with stronger expectations of authenticity, recognition, and meaning in work, while Generation X is often characterised as more pragmatic and independent, and Baby Boomers as more accepting of established organisational boundaries (Kumar 2014; Lancaster and Stillman 2003). These broad patterns should be treated with caution, but they suggest that generational cohort may influence whether employees expect explicit recognition of religious identity or whether they prefer to manage such matters privately (Benson and Brown 2011; Twenge, Campbell, and Hoffman 2015).

Responses to value conflict

Another theme in the literature concerns how employees respond when organisational expectations appear to come into tension with personal beliefs. Research on work values, identity, and organisational fit suggests that employees may adopt different strategies in such circumstances. Some may seek clarification, discussion, or accommodation; others may adapt quietly to organisational expectations; and others may attempt to avoid

conflict altogether (Jurkiewicz and Giacalone 2004; Tourish and Robson 2006). These responses are likely to be shaped by the perceived legitimacy of religious expression within the organisation, by confidence in managerial support, and by the extent to which employees believe relevant policies are accessible and meaningful (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005).

This issue is particularly important because the handling of value conflict can reveal how inclusion operates in practice. Even where organisations present themselves as supportive, employees may hesitate to raise concerns if they are uncertain how their beliefs will be received. Conversely, where employees perceive support as credible and consistent, they may be more willing to seek dialogue or request adjustment (ACAS 2014; Mitchell et al. 2015).

Conceptual framing of the present study

Taken together, the literature indicates that the expression of religious identity at work is shaped by a combination of individual identity, generational expectations, organisational context, and the communication of policy (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005). It also suggests that formal policy and lived experience may not align. While related literatures on workplace spirituality, leadership, and organisational culture provide useful background, they should be treated cautiously in this context because the present study does not directly measure organisational culture, leadership behaviour, or workplace spirituality as a broad construct (Fry 2003; Karakas 2010; Mhatre and Mehta 2023). Instead, it focuses on employees' perceptions of support for the expression of religious identity at work, their awareness of relevant policies, and their reported responses to value conflict.

This focus addresses an important gap in the literature. Quantitative evidence in the United Kingdom context remains limited, especially research comparing perceptions across religious groups and generational cohorts within a single organisational setting (Benson and Brown 2011; Mitchell et al. 2015). There is also relatively little evidence on the extent to which employees are aware of organisational arrangements concerning religion or belief, or on how they believe they would respond if organisational and personal values came into tension (Morgan 2005; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Perceptions of organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work will differ across religious groups.

Hypothesis 2

Perceptions of organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work will differ across generational cohorts.

Hypothesis 3

Employees will demonstrate low awareness of organisational policies related to the expression of religious identity at work.

Hypothesis 4

Employees' reported responses to value conflict will differ across religious groups and generational cohorts.

Summary

The literature indicates that religion and belief at work remain important but incompletely understood aspects of organisational life. Existing research points to the significance of policy visibility, organisational context, religious group differences, and generational expectations, but there is limited quantitative evidence examining how these factors interact in practice within a United Kingdom workplace (Benson and Brown 2011; Mitchell et al. 2015; Parry and Urwin 2011). By focusing specifically on employee perceptions of support for the expression of religious identity at work, rather than on workplace spirituality as a general construct, the present study seeks to provide a more precise empirical contribution to the literature on religion, belief, and inclusion in organisations (Mhatre and Mehta 2023; Morgan 2005).

Methods

Research design

The study adopted a quantitative survey design to examine how employees from different religious backgrounds and generational cohorts perceived organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work within a large retail organisation in the United Kingdom. This design was chosen because the literature reviewed above highlights a need for more empirical evidence about how religion and belief are experienced in organisational settings, particularly evidence that allows comparison across employee groups (Benson and Brown 2011; Mitchell et al. 2015).

A survey approach was appropriate because it enabled the study to capture employee perceptions of support, policy awareness, and anticipated responses to value conflict across a geographically dispersed workforce. The design therefore aligned with the study's central concern: how employees interpreted religion and belief in everyday organisational life, rather than how formal policy or organisational culture operated in the abstract (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005).

Participants and sampling

At the time of data collection, the organisation employed 812 staff across 55 stores. All employees were invited to participate, and 385 completed the survey, representing a response rate of 47.4 per cent. This response rate was sufficient to support descriptive analysis and comparison across the principal religious and generational categories used in the study (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994; Pallant 2020).

Participants were grouped into three generational cohorts commonly used in research on workplace values: Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials (Kumar 2014; Lancaster and Stillman 2003). Respondents also identified their religious affiliation. Christian and Muslim employees formed the two largest religious

groups, while a third category included employees whose responses fell outside those two groups, including other faith positions and those reporting no religious affiliation. These categories were retained to support comparison while reflecting the distribution of responses within the dataset.

Instrument

The survey instrument contained six items addressing employees' perceptions of organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work, awareness of relevant organisational policies, and likely responses when organisational expectations appeared to conflict with personal beliefs. The items were informed by the literature on inclusion, policy communication, perceived legitimacy, and recognition of religion or belief in organisational settings (ACAS 2014; Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005).

A pilot study involving 30 employees was used to assess clarity and relevance. Feedback indicated that the original seven-point response format was unnecessarily complex, and a five-point scale was adopted for the final instrument to improve usability and response consistency. As with any survey on an abstract and potentially sensitive topic, the wording of items may have allowed some respondents to interpret support broadly, including through the lens of general well-being provision; this issue is returned to in the discussion of limitations (Ashmos and Duchon 2000; Karakas 2010).

Procedure

The survey was administered electronically across all stores to ensure accessibility for employees working different shift patterns and in geographically dispersed locations. The invitation explained that the purpose of the research was to explore employee perceptions of support for the expression of religious identity at work and that responses would remain anonymous. This was particularly important given the potential sensitivity of religion and belief in organisational settings (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005).

The survey remained open for several weeks, during which reminders were issued to encourage participation. Responses were submitted anonymously and stored securely. Anonymity was intended to support honest reporting on a topic that employees may regard as private or difficult to discuss openly (Morgan 2005; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001).

Data analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Responses were screened for completeness before analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise demographic characteristics and overall response patterns, while reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.804, indicating good internal consistency across the six items (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994; Pallant 2020).

To examine Hypotheses 1 and 2, group comparisons were conducted to examine differences in survey responses across religious identity and generational cohort. One-

way analyses of variance were used where variables contained three or more categories. Where assumptions of normality or homogeneity of variance were not met, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was employed. Statistical significance was assessed at $p < .05$.

Hypothesis 3 addressed employee awareness of organisational policies related to the expression of religious identity at work. This was examined through descriptive analysis of responses concerning policy knowledge, policy location, and perceived availability of guidance. Hypothesis 4 focused on how employees reported they would respond when organisational and personal values came into tension, again comparing patterns across religious and generational groups.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the LJMU Research Ethics Committee (UREC) (Approval No. 12/BLW/012). Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and employees were informed of their right to withdraw before completing the survey. The organisation did not have access to individual-level data. These measures were intended to ensure that the study met appropriate ethical standards for organisational research.

Findings

The findings are presented in relation to the four hypotheses. Data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 31. Descriptive statistics, which included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarise demographic characteristics, policy awareness, and overall response patterns. Internal consistency of the survey instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .804$). To examine differences between religious identity groups and generational cohorts, independent-samples t-tests were conducted, with statistical significance assessed at $p < .05$. Together, these results provide an empirical overview of how employees interpreted organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work within the organisation

Descriptive overview of the sample

The final sample consisted of 385 employees from 55 stores across the United Kingdom. Respondents represented a range of religious affiliations and generational backgrounds, providing an appropriate basis for examining variation in perceived organisational support and policy awareness (Table 1).

Table 1. Generational and religious categories.

	Millennials	Generation X	Baby Boomers	Total
Age categories	20–42 years	43–51 years	52 years or older	
Christians	116	76	61	253
Muslims	32	16	20	68
Other	18	26	20	64
Total	166	118	101	385

Millennials formed the largest generational group in the sample, followed by Generation X and then Baby Boomers. Christian, Muslim, and Other respondents were all represented, supporting comparison across the principal categories used in the analysis.

Perceptions of organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work

The first hypothesis proposed that perceptions of organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work would differ across religious groups. The analysis indicated notable differences. Muslim employees consistently reported the lowest levels of perceived organisational support, Christian employees reported more moderate levels, and employees in the Other category reported the highest levels of perceived inclusivity.

These results suggest that employees from different religious backgrounds did not experience organisational support in the same way. One possible interpretation is that employees whose beliefs involve more visible or structured forms of expression may be more likely to notice ambiguity or limitation in organisational guidance. The study does not directly test the causes of these differences, but the pattern is consistent with earlier work indicating that religion and belief are not experienced uniformly across employee groups (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of Muslim, Christian, and Other employees' perceptions of organisational policies and procedures.

Variables	Mean (Standard Deviation)	Religion	P-Value
My organisation has a clear policy on ethical, cultural, and ethnic spiritual diversity	1.26 (1.41)	Muslim	.001
	2.26 (2.20)	Christian	.005
	1.69 (1.01)	Other	.069
My organisation has a clear policy on spirituality	1.07 (1.19)	Muslim	.000
	1.25 (2.10)	Christian	.000
	1.31 (.78)	Other	.016
I am aware of how my organization's policies and procedures on spirituality influence work on a day-to-day basis	1.15 (1.36)	Muslim	.004
	2.11 (1.56)	Christian	.003
	2.46 (.90)	Other	.263
I am aware of a health or wellnessprogrammewithin my workplace	3.10 (1.15)	Muslim	.002
	4.22 (.69)	Christian	.011
	3.16 (1.14)	Other	.003
I respect andcomply withcompany procedures and rules,whether or notthey conform to my personal values and beliefs	2.22 (1.46)	Muslim	.002
	3.22 (1.44)	Christian	.032
	3.44 (1.05)	Other	.778
I am aware of a work-life balanceprogrammewithin my workplace	1.14 (.85)	Muslim	.003
	2.11 (2.10)	Christian	.001
	1.33 (1.61)	Other	.113

Values are means with standard deviations shown in parentheses. Group differences were examined using one-way ANOVA. Where assumptions of normality or homogeneity of variance were violated, Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted. Analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 31. Statistical significance was assessed at $p < .05$.

Taken together, these differences were consistent with Hypothesis 1 and suggest that religious identity was an important factor in shaping perceived organisational support.

Generational differences in perceptions of organisational support

The second hypothesis proposed that perceptions of organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work would differ across generational cohorts. The findings were consistent with that expectation. Millennials reported stronger expectations of authenticity, meaning, and personal expression, but lower confidence that the organisation supported these expectations. Generation X employees reported more moderate perceptions, while Baby Boomers appeared more comfortable with existing organisational arrangements and less likely to expect explicit recognition of religious identity at work.

These patterns should be interpreted cautiously, as generational categories are broad and do not capture all individual variation. Even so, the results suggest that employees from different age cohorts may interpret the absence of explicit guidance or recognition in different ways. Overall, the findings were consistent with Hypothesis 2.

Awareness of organisational policies

The third hypothesis predicted that employees would demonstrate low levels of awareness of organisational policies related to the expression of religious identity at work. The findings strongly support this hypothesis. Across the sample, many employees reported that they did not know where relevant policies were located, while others were unsure whether such policies existed at all.

This pattern was evident across religious and generational groups, suggesting that policy visibility was limited from the employee perspective rather than being confined to one particular subgroup. Respondents often indicated that they would rely on personal judgement or managerial guidance when questions arose, implying that formal organisational procedures were not highly visible in day-to-day practice (Table 3).

These results confirm Hypothesis 3 and highlight the importance of policy communication in shaping employee confidence.

Responses to conflict between organisational and personal values

The fourth hypothesis proposed that employees' reported responses to conflict between organisational values and personal beliefs would vary across religious groups and generational cohorts. The descriptive findings indicated some variation across religious groups. Muslim employees were more likely to report that they would seek clarification or request an adjustment, while Christian employees were more likely to indicate that they would adapt to organisational expectations. Employees in the Other category were more likely to suggest that such conflict was unlikely to arise.

Differences were also apparent across generational cohorts. Millennial's were more likely to report that they would raise concerns or seek dialogue, while Baby Boomers were more likely to continue existing practices without escalation. Generation X employees tended to report a more situational response. However, these patterns were not consistent or sufficiently distinct across all religious and generational groups to demonstrate a clear overall difference.

Table 3. Generational differences in policies and procedures (M = Muslim, C = Christian, O = Other).

Age	N	My organisation has a clear policy on ethical, cultural, and ethnic spiritual diversity			My organisation has a clear policy on spirituality			I am aware of how my organisation's policies and procedures on spirituality influence work on a day-to-day basis			I am aware of a health or wellness programme within my workplace			I respect and comply with company procedures and rules, whether or not they conform to my personal values and beliefs			I am aware of a work-life balance programme within my workplace		
		M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O
20-42 (Millennials)	166	1.11	2.21	2.14	1.04	1.63	1.54	2.21	3.06	2.26	3.99	4.25	4.15	2.01	3.31	3.35	1.11	2.06	2.18
		M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O
43-51 (Gen X)	118	2.11	2.15	2.66	1.16	1.89	1.21	2.88	2.99	3.01	4.01	3.33	3.89	2.11	2.99	2.65	1.01	2.11	1.99
		M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O
52 years or older (Baby Boomers)	101	1.56	1.88	1.32	1.29	1.96	1.19	1.66	1.88	1.83	4.33	4.02	4.11	2.16	3.49	3.5	1.35	3.01	2.11
		M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O	M	C	O
Sig.		$p < .001$			$p < .000$			$p < .031$			$p < .000$			$p < .004$			$p < .000$		

All group comparisons were examined using one-way ANOVA. Where assumptions were violated, the Kruskal-Wallis test was applied.

Hypothesis 4 was therefore partially supported at a descriptive level. The response patterns varied across some religious and generational groups, but the available analysis did not establish that these differences were consistent across all groups. The findings should consequently be interpreted as indicative patterns rather than conclusive evidence of systematic group differences.

Summary of findings

Overall, the findings indicate that perceptions of organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work varied across religious and generational groups. Policy awareness was consistently low, suggesting that employees did not regard formal support as highly visible or clearly communicated. Reported responses to value conflict also varied across groups, indicating that employees differed in how they believed they would respond when organisational expectations and personal beliefs came into tension.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how employees from different religious groups and generational cohorts perceived organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work within a large retail organisation in the United Kingdom. The findings suggest that these perceptions were not uniform across the workforce. Differences were evident between religious groups and generational cohorts, while awareness of relevant organisational policies was consistently low. Taken together, the results indicate that employees' experiences of religious identity at work are shaped not only by personal belief, but also by how organisational support is communicated and interpreted in practice (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005).

Differences between religious groups

The first hypothesis proposed that perceptions of organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work would differ across religious groups, and the findings were consistent with that expectation. Muslim employees reported the lowest levels of perceived support, Christian employees reported more moderate levels, and employees in the Other category reported the highest perceived levels of inclusivity. These differences suggest that employees do not experience the organisational environment in the same way, and that broad organisational approaches may be interpreted differently depending on employees' religious identity and the forms of expression associated with that identity (Forstenlechner and Al Waqfi 2010; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001).

One possible interpretation is that employees whose religious identity involves more visible or structured practices may be more likely to notice ambiguity, inconsistency, or lack of clarity in organisational support. By contrast, employees whose beliefs are less visible, less institutionally defined, or less likely to require practical adjustment may experience the organisation as more flexible or accommodating (Forstenlechner and Al Waqfi 2010; Mitchell et al. 2015). Although this study does not directly examine

the reasons for these differences, the findings are consistent with earlier research suggesting that religion and belief are not experienced uniformly across employee groups and that some forms of religious identity may be more difficult to express within organisational settings than others (Mabey et al. 2017; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001).

These findings are particularly important because they suggest that apparently neutral organisational practices may not be experienced as equally inclusive by all employees. A general commitment to equality or diversity may therefore be insufficient if it is not accompanied by clear guidance and consistent implementation across different forms of religious expression (ACAS 2014; Mitchell et al. 2015). The results do not show that the organisation intentionally favoured or disadvantaged particular groups, but they do indicate that employees' perceptions of support varied in meaningful ways across religious categories.

Differences between generational cohorts

The second hypothesis proposed that perceptions of organisational support would differ across generational cohorts, and the findings also suggest variation in this respect. Millennials reported stronger expectations for meaning, authenticity, and personal expression, but lower confidence that the organisation supported these expectations. Generation X employees reported more moderate perceptions, while Baby Boomers appeared more comfortable with existing organisational arrangements and less likely to expect explicit recognition of religious identity at work. These patterns are consistent with broader discussions of generational variation in work values and expectations (Kumar 2014; Lancaster and Stillman 2003; Twenge, Campbell, and Hoffman 2015).

These findings can be interpreted in relation to wider literature on generational differences in work values, which suggests that younger employees may place greater emphasis on authenticity and alignment between personal and organisational values (Benson and Brown 2011; Parry and Urwin 2011). However, caution is needed here. Generational categories are broad and can sometimes obscure individual variation. The present findings should therefore not be read as fixed characteristics of age groups, but rather as indicative of different patterns of expectation and perception within this organisational setting.

Even with that caution, the results suggest that younger employees may be more likely to notice a gap between their expectations and the support they perceive to be available. Older employees, by contrast, may be more accustomed to keeping personal beliefs separate from organisational life or may be less likely to expect formal acknowledgement of religious identity in the workplace (Kumar 2014; Lancaster and Stillman 2003).

Awareness of organisational policies

The third hypothesis predicted that employees would demonstrate low awareness of organisational policies related to the expression of religious identity at work, and the findings strongly indicate that this was the case. Across religious and generational groups, many employees reported that they did not know where such policies were located or were unsure whether relevant policies existed at all. This pattern suggests that policy visibility was limited from the perspective of employees and that formal

organisational provisions, if present, were not strongly embedded in everyday awareness (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005).

This is a significant finding because it points to a possible gap between formal policy and lived organisational experience. Employees may work within an organisation that has equality and diversity procedures in place, but if those procedures are not visible, clearly communicated, or understood as relevant to religion and belief, they may have limited practical value in shaping employee confidence (ACAS 2014; Mitchell et al. 2015). In that sense, the results do not necessarily demonstrate the absence of policy, but they do suggest limited employee awareness of how organisational support operates in practice.

The findings are also consistent with earlier work suggesting that religion and belief in United Kingdom workplaces are often addressed indirectly or treated as private matters rather than explicitly discussed through organisational procedures (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005). Where this occurs, employees may rely on line managers or informal judgement rather than on clear and trusted guidance, increasing the likelihood of inconsistency across teams and locations (Mitchell et al. 2015; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001).

A further point is that some respondents may have interpreted organisational support through the lens of general well-being or wellness provision rather than religion or belief specifically. This is important because it highlights the conceptual ambiguity that can surround employee responses in this area. Prior literature has noted that spirituality and religion can be blurred with broader well-being or humanistic management concepts, particularly where organisational language is general rather than explicit (Ashmos and Duchon 2000; Karakas 2010; Mhatre and Mehta 2023).

Responses to value conflict

The fourth hypothesis proposed that employees' reported responses to conflict between organisational values and personal beliefs would vary across religious and generational groups, and the findings provide some support for that expectation. Muslim employees were more likely to indicate that they would seek clarification or adjustment, Christian employees were more likely to adapt to organisational expectations, and employees in the Other category were more likely to suggest that such conflict was unlikely to arise. Millennials were more likely to report willingness to raise concerns, while older cohorts appeared somewhat less likely to escalate value-related tensions. These patterns are broadly consistent with research on organisational fit, employee voice, and the management of value conflict (Jurkiewicz and Giacalone 2004; Tourish and Robson 2006).

These differences should be interpreted carefully. The data capture reported intentions rather than observed behaviour, and they therefore reflect how employees believe they would respond rather than how they necessarily have responded in practice. Even so, the patterns are useful because they show that employees do not imagine organisational conflict in the same way. Some appear more willing to seek discussion or accommodation, while others appear more likely to adapt quietly or avoid confrontation (Mitchell et al. 2015; Tourish and Robson 2006).

The findings therefore suggest that value conflict is not simply an individual matter but is connected to how employees perceive the organisation as a context for dialogue, adjustment, and recognition. Where support is seen as limited or uncertain, employees

may be less confident in raising concerns. Where support is perceived as available or legitimate, employees may be more willing to seek clarification or accommodation (ACAS 2014; Mitchell et al. 2015).

Interpreting the findings in relation to wider literature

Taken together, the findings are consistent with wider literature suggesting that religion and belief at work are shaped by both individual identity and organisational context. They indicate that employees' perceptions of support are affected by whether policies are visible, whether expectations appear clear, and whether different forms of religious expression are likely to be recognised as legitimate in practice (Mitchell et al. 2015; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001). The results also suggest that organisational provisions framed only in broad or generic terms may not be experienced uniformly across employee groups (Greenwald 2012; Morgan 2005).

At the same time, it is important not to overstate what this study can demonstrate. The research does not provide a direct assessment of organisational culture, leadership behaviour, or the formal adequacy of policy documentation. Nor does it test broad theories of workplace spirituality or spiritual leadership. Instead, it offers employee-level evidence about perceived support, policy awareness, and anticipated responses to value conflict. Any interpretation in relation to organisational culture or wider theoretical models must therefore remain cautious and inferential (Fry 2003; Karakas 2010; Mhatre and Mehta 2023).

For that reason, the findings are best understood as contributing to research on religion and belief at work by showing how employees interpret organisational support in a specific setting. They suggest that inclusion cannot be assumed simply because general equality policies exist. What matters from the employee perspective is whether organisational expectations are visible, understandable, and applied with enough consistency to inspire confidence across different groups (ACAS 2014; Mitchell et al. 2015).

Practical interpretation

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that organisations may need to communicate more clearly how religion and belief are recognised within existing equality and inclusion arrangements. Employees appear to benefit not only from the existence of policy but from confidence that policy is relevant, accessible, and capable of guiding consistent responses (ACAS 2014; Mitchell et al. 2015). Clearer communication may reduce uncertainty and help employees understand what forms of support are available when questions or tensions arise.

The results also suggest that a uniform approach may not be experienced as equally fair by all groups. If employees differ in the visibility of their religious practices or in the kinds of support they may require, then fairness may depend on clarity, consistency, and openness to reasonable adjustment rather than on general statements alone (Forstenelechner and Al Waqfi 2010; Mitchell et al. 2015). This does not require organisations to privilege one group over another, but it does suggest that inclusive practice should be sufficiently explicit to reassure employees that religion and belief are recognised as legitimate aspects of workplace identity.

Summary

Overall, the discussion indicates that perceptions of support for the expression of religious identity at work varied across religious and generational groups, while policy awareness remained low across the organisation. The findings suggest that employees' experiences are shaped by how organisational support is communicated and interpreted, rather than by formal policy presence alone (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005). Although the study does not directly measure organisational culture or policy quality, it provides evidence that employees do not experience religion and belief at work uniformly and that clearer communication and more consistent implementation may be important in strengthening confidence across the workforce (ACAS 2014; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001).

Conclusions and implications

This study examined how employees in a large United Kingdom retail organisation perceived organisational support for the expression of religious identity at work. Using survey data from 385 employees across 55 stores, it explored whether perceptions differed across religious groups and generational cohorts, the extent to which employees were aware of relevant organisational policies, and how they reported they would respond when organisational expectations appeared to conflict with personal beliefs. The findings suggest that support was not perceived uniformly across the workforce and that awareness of relevant policy was limited.

Differences across religious groups were particularly noteworthy. Muslim employees reported the lowest levels of perceived organisational support, Christian employees reported more moderate levels, and employees in the Other category reported the highest levels of perceived inclusivity. Generational differences were also evident. Millennials appeared more likely to expect authenticity, meaning, and recognition of personal identity at work, yet they reported lower confidence that the organisation supported these expectations. By contrast, older cohorts appeared more likely to accept existing organisational arrangements and less likely to expect explicit recognition of religious identity. These findings indicate that perceptions of support are shaped by both individual identity and differences in employee expectations.

A further important finding was the consistently low level of policy awareness across the sample. Many employees were unsure whether relevant policies existed or where they could be found. This suggests that, from the employee perspective, formal organisational support was not highly visible or clearly understood in practice. The study does not provide a direct audit of the organisation's policy framework, nor does it assess managerial behaviour or organisational culture directly. However, it does indicate that employees' confidence in organisational support may depend as much on communication and implementation as on the formal existence of policy itself.

Theoretical implications

The study contributes to research on religion and belief at work by providing quantitative evidence from a United Kingdom organisational setting, an area in which empirical research remains relatively limited (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005). It also highlights the value of distinguishing between workplace spirituality as a broad and contested construct and the more specific issue of the expression of religious identity at work (Ashmos

and Duchon 2000; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone 2004; Mhatre and Mehta 2023). By focusing on the latter, the study offers a more precise account of how employees perceive support in relation to religion or belief within everyday organisational life.

The findings also suggest that employee perceptions of support are shaped by a combination of religious identity, generational expectations, and policy visibility. In this respect, the study supports the view that religion and belief at work should be examined not only as matters of individual conviction, but also as issues mediated by organisational communication and perceived legitimacy (Mitchell et al. 2015; Weller, Feldman, and Purdam 2001). At the same time, these conclusions should be treated with appropriate caution. Because organisational culture, leadership behaviour, and policy implementation were not directly measured, the study cannot make strong claims about the causal role of those factors (Fry 2003; Karakas 2010).

Practical implications

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that organisations may wish to strengthen the visibility and accessibility of policies relating to religion and belief at work. A policy framework may have limited impact if employees are unclear about where guidance is located, how it applies, or whether raising concerns will lead to fair and consistent responses (ACAS 2014; Mitchell et al. 2015). Clearer communication may therefore be as important as policy content itself in shaping employee confidence.

The results also indicate that a general commitment to equality and inclusion may not be experienced in the same way by all employee groups. Organisations may therefore need to consider whether existing arrangements are sufficiently explicit, consistent, and practical to reassure employees from different religious backgrounds that their beliefs will be respected (Forstenlechner and Al Waqfi 2010; Mitchell et al. 2015). This does not imply that all groups require the same forms of support, but it does suggest that fairness depends on how organisational commitments are interpreted and enacted in everyday settings.

Limitations and future research

The study has several limitations. It was conducted within a single organisation and therefore reflects one particular organisational setting. As a result, the findings cannot be generalised uncritically to other sectors or employers. The use of self-report survey data also means that the study captures employee perceptions and reported intentions, rather than observed behaviour or independently verified policy practice. In addition, some respondents may have interpreted organisational support through the lens of general well-being or well-ness provision rather than religion or belief specifically, which highlights the importance of conceptual clarity in future research (Ashmos and Duchon 2000; Karakas 2010).

Future studies could usefully compare multiple organisations or sectors to assess whether these patterns are replicated elsewhere. Qualitative research could also deepen understanding of how employees interpret religious identity at work, how managers handle requests or tensions in practice, and how organisational policies are experienced on the ground. Further research might also examine more directly the relationship between religion and belief policies, managerial discretion, and employee confidence in organisational support (Mitchell et al. 2015; Morgan 2005).

Final conclusion

Overall, this study suggests that the expression of religious identity at work is experienced unevenly across a diverse workforce and that policy awareness remains limited, even where organisations may have formal equality frameworks in place. The findings point to the importance of clear communication, consistent practice, and visible organisational support in helping employees feel confident that religion and belief are recognised as legitimate aspects of workplace identity (ACAS 2014; Equality Act 2010, 2010; Mitchell et al. 2015).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Scott Foster is a Professor of Postgraduate Research Culture at Liverpool John Moores University. My research approach extends to exploring ways institutions develop policies and procedures to enable student-centred practice, especially in the development of an understanding of diversity and well-being within organisational culture.

Dr. Ben George is the CEO of the Lucy Meal Foundation and a researcher. He holds a Ph.D. in Business Management from Liverpool John Moores University. Ben's interests include labour market inequality, employee well-being, diversity, and business ethics. His research focuses on ethnic minorities' experiences of labour market inequality, concerns about differential treatment, and constraints on social mobility in the UK.

Dr. Jyoti Kukreja is a behavioral studies expert with over 18 years of experience in research, soft skills, advocacy, and education. With a background in neuroscience and psychology, her work focuses on the biopsychosocial impacts of trauma, gender equity, and emotional healing. She has previously authored and co-edited books on workplace mental health, neuroleadership, and healing from abuse. She is a reviewer with global publishers: Emerald, Sage, Elsevier, Bentham, Taylor and Francis and IGI Global. She staunchly believes in building thoughts through multidisciplinary discussion. She is certified in neuroscience and negotiation skills from the University of Colorado and Michigan, respectively.

Anna Foster is Lead School Partner Programmes Director at the University of Chester. Her research explores the relationship between professional autonomy, performative accountability, teacher identity and well-being within English secondary education, with particular interest in how leadership and organisational culture shape professional practice.

ORCID

Scott Foster  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8659-963X>

Ben George  <http://orcid.org/0009-0003-6413-7831>

Jyoti Kukreja  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0642-1362>

Anna Foster  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4310-020X>

References

- ACAS. 2014. Religion or Belief Discrimination. Available at: <https://www.acas.org.uk>.
- Ashmos, D. P., and D. Duchon. 2000. "Spirituality at Work: A Conceptualisation and Measure." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 9 (2): 134–145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105649260092008>

- Benson, J., and M. Brown. 2011. "Generations at Work: Are There Differences and Do They Matter?" *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 22 (9): 1843–1865. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2011.573966>
- Equality Act 2010. 2010. London: The Stationery Office. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents> (Accessed: 28 May 2026).
- Forstenlechner, I., and M. Al Waqfi. 2010. "A Job Interview for Mo, but None for Mohammed." *Personnel Review* 39 (6): 742–761. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483481011075602>
- Fry, L. W. 2003. "Toward a Theory of Spiritual Leadership." *The Leadership Quarterly* 14 (6): 693–727. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.001>
- Greenwald, R. 2012. "Religion and the Workplace." *Sociology Compass* 6 (10): 800–813.
- Jurkiewicz, C. L., and R. A. Giacalone. 2004. "A Values Framework for Measuring the Impact of Workplace Spirituality on Organizational Performance." *Journal of Business Ethics* 49 (2): 129–142. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:BUSI.0000015843.22195.b9>
- Karakas, F. 2010. "Spirituality and Performance in Organisations." *Journal of Business Ethics* 94:89–106. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-009-0251-5>
- Kourie, C. 2007. "The 'turn' to Spirituality." *Acta Theologica* 27 (2): 19–40.
- Kumar, R. 2014. "Understanding the Millennial Workforce." *International Journal of Business Management* 9 (10): 15–22.
- Lancaster, L. C., and D. Stillman. 2003. *When Generations Collide: Who They Are, Why They Clash, How to Solve the Generational Puzzle at Work*. New York: HarperBusiness.
- Mabey, C., M. Conroy, K. Blakeley, and S. de Marco. 2017. "Having Burned the Straw Man of Christian Spiritual Leadership, What Can We Learn from Jesus?" *Management Learning* 48 (4): 443–460. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-016-3054-5>
- Mhatre, S. G., and N. K. Mehta. 2023. "A Review of Workplace Spirituality: Identifying Present Development and Future Research Agenda." *Management Research Review* 46 (9): 1185–1206. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-11-2021-0800>
- Mitchell, M., K. Beninger, A. Donald, and E. Howard. 2015. *Religion or Belief in the Workplace and Service Delivery: Findings from a Call for Evidence*. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission / NatCen Social Research.
- Morgan, J. 2005. "Religion at Work." *Sociology Review* 15 (3): 8–10.
- Nunnally, J. C., and I. H. Bernstein. 1994. *Psychometric Theory* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Pallant, J. 2020. *SPSS Survival Manual: A Step by Step Guide to Data Analysis Using IBM SPSS* (7th ed.). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Parry, E., and P. Urwin. 2011. "Generational Differences in Work Values." *Management Research Review* 34 (11): 1501–1515.
- Saks, A. 2011. "Workplace Spirituality and Employee Engagement." *Human Resource Development Quarterly* 22 (1): 27–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766086.2011.630170>
- Sargeant, S., and J. Yoxall. 2023. "Psychology and Spirituality: Reviewing Developments in History, Method and Practice." *Journal of Religion and Health* 62 (2): 1159–1174. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-022-01731-1>
- Snyder, C. R., and S. J. Lopez, Eds. 2001. *Handbook of Positive Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tourish, D., and P. Robson. 2006. "Sensemaking and the Distortion of Critical Upward Communication." *Management Communication Quarterly* 20 (2): 235–256. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2006.00608.x>
- Twenge, J., S. Campbell, and B. Hoffman. 2015. "Generational Differences in Work Values." *Journal of Business and Psychology* 30:251–265.
- Weller, P., A. Feldman, and K. Purdam. 2001. "Home Office Research Study 220: Religious Discrimination in England and Wales." *London Home Office* 220: 1–197. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e454512008-001>