Beyond the Law: Processes Underlying Religious Accommodation Decisions

Pooya Tabesh
Cameron School of Business
The University of St. Thomas - Houston
3800 Montrose Blvd.
Houston, TX 77006
tabeshp@stthom.edu

Phillip M. Jolly
School of Hospitality Management
The Pennsylvania State University
223 Mateer Building
University Park, PA 16802
pmj12@psu.edu

Accepted for publication in Management Decision
https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-11-2017-1087

This article is © Emerald Group Publishing and permission has been granted for this version to appear here. Published version of record available at https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/MD-11-2017-1087. Emerald does not grant permission for this article to be further copied/distributed or hosted elsewhere without the express permission from Emerald Publishing Limited

*Both authors contributed equally to this paper and are listed in reverse alphabetical order
Beyond the law: Processes underlying religious accommodation decisions

Abstract

Purpose: Currently, the academic understanding of religious accommodation at workplace is skewed toward a consideration of legal decision-making. The main purpose of this research is to move beyond these legal considerations and provide a fresh perspective on antecedents of religious accommodation decisions when managerial discretion is high. To this end, we present a model that incorporates psychological and relational processes.

Approach: This research draws on a variety of theoretical perspectives from psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management to theorize a descriptive model of managerial decision-making regarding religious accommodation requests.

Findings: The authors develop a conceptual framework and research agenda for examining front-line decision-makers’ responses to employees’ religious accommodation requests. The focus is on characteristics of the decision-maker, the requester, and the request that can influence the perceived sincerity of a request and the perceived accommodation cost.

Research Implications: Our proposed model moves beyond US-based legal perspectives of religious accommodation and facilitates the identification of novel theoretical perspectives for better understanding accommodation decisions.

Practical Implications: 21st century managers are faced with a wide variety of religious accommodation requests. Identification of underlying mechanisms through which these decisions are made facilitates effective interventions to build and sustain an inclusive culture.

Originality: This work is among the first efforts in the management literature to theorize about the process of religious accommodation decision-making. We address the paucity of academic research in this area by introducing perceptual drivers of religious accommodation decisions.
Keywords: Decision making, Religious accommodation, Diversity, Organizational behavior, Human resource management

Article Classification: Conceptual paper
1. Introduction

Workplaces in Western countries are experiencing greater religious and cultural diversity than ever before (Robinson and Harvey, 2008; Wuthnow, 2011). Coinciding with this growing diversity is a desire on the part of many employees to bring aspects of their religions into the workplace, presenting organizations with a wider variety of religious accommodation requests than ever before (Bader et al., 2013). However, not all managers and organizations are equipped with policies and guidelines for addressing such requests, and as a result, the number of legal disputes regarding religion in the workplace has increased (Borstorf et al., 2012; Alidadi, 2017). In the United States, the previous decade has seen more than a doubling of religious discrimination claims, and awards to claimants increased more than three-fold from 1999 to 2012 (Lund Dean et al., 2014). In addition, mishandling requests for religious accommodation can negatively impact employee satisfaction and performance and incur negative reputational consequences for organizations (Beane et al., 2017).

Despite the potential for significant costs to organizations that do not properly handle religious accommodation requests, management research has largely failed to keep up with the issues raised by growing religious diversity. Previous examinations of workplace religious accommodation have provided practical insights for dealing with accommodation requests, often drawing on the prescriptive guidelines of a US-based legal framework (e.g., Borstorff and Arlington, 2011). However, little is known about the psychological and relational dynamics underlying religious accommodation decisions (King and Ahmad, 2010). Tellingly, a recent review of religious discrimination and accommodation research has noted the need to improve our understanding of the decision-making process surrounding religious accommodation requests (Ghumman et al., 2013).
In this work, we shed light on the process through which front-line managers make religious accommodation decisions. While we acknowledge that laws and organizational policies may sometimes dictate how such requests should be handled, evidence suggests that when managerial discretion, or latitude of action, is high (e.g., in the absence or ignorance of clear organizational guidelines or legal protections), workplace religious accommodation decisions are handled informally and internally (Adam and Rea, 2017). This implies that managers may often consider other factors to come to a determination about a request, yet these important extralegal factors are not well-understood. Thus, the purpose of our work is to advance understanding of the psychological and relational characteristics that influence accommodation decisions. We draw on multiple disciplines to provide a fresh theoretical perspective for examining the extralegal antecedents of religious accommodation decisions. Additionally, by presenting a better understanding of decision processes surrounding religious accommodation in the workplace, we offer important insights for practitioners.

2. Background

General workplace accommodation is an established concept in the management literature (McCray, 1987). Yet recently, legal and political debates surrounding workplace accommodation have given rise to conversations oriented toward specific types of accommodation. For example, disability accommodation research has attracted significant research attention (e.g., Stone and Colella, 1996; Baldridge and Veiga, 2006). Despite the various similarities between requests for accommodation of religion and disability in the workplace, there are also important differences. First, religious accommodation is a relatively new phenomenon and its importance has been intensified by geopolitical changes around the globe that have contributed to increased diversity in Western societies (Adam and Rea, 2017).
Additionally, while disability requests are based on physical or mental constraints that are medically verifiable, the religious beliefs of employees are internally held and cannot be easily verified (O’Halloran, 2017). Finally, while workplace accommodation for employees with disability is an “established right” in international, US, and EU laws, religious accommodation has not received unified legal treatment (Alidadi, 2017).

2.1. Religious Accommodation: Legal Perspectives

Legal requirements regarding religious accommodation vary widely among Western countries. In many European countries, the legal system does not address religious accommodation in the workplace and “few explicit reasonable accommodation duties extending beyond disability have been adopted” (Alidadi, 2012, p. 694). Therefore, many requests in European countries are handled through informal channels and there exists significant space for the application of managerial discretion (Bader et al., 2013). For example, Adam and Rea (2017) studied 300 requests by Muslim employees in Belgium and characterized these requests as being “internally” handled and “informally” resolved.

In the United States and Canada, employment laws regarding religious accommodations are more specific. In the US, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces specific regulations for workplace religious accommodation requiring employers to provide “reasonable accommodation of an employee’s sincerely held religious beliefs or practices – or lack thereof – if an accommodation will not impose more than a de minimis cost or burden on business operations” (EEOC, 2008). Despite legal guidelines, there is widespread confusion among front-line managers about proper procedure for handling religious accommodation requests (Borstorff et al., 2012), yet many US organizations rely heavily on front-line managers, untrained in accommodation law, to make decisions about such requests (see Florey and
Overall, legal requirements differ across countries and some degree of managerial discretion exists in many religious accommodation situations. In countries where employment laws do not address religious accommodation, managerial discretion in decision-making is at its greatest.

2.2. Workplace Religious Accommodation in Management Literature

A well-established stream of research in the management literature is focused on the recognition that employees’ inner life is tied to their professional and social existence (e.g., Rego and Pina e Cunha, 2008). In this vein, the many benefits that come with the accommodation of religion and spirituality in the workplace have been discussed in detail (Miller and Ewest, 2015). For instance, accommodating spiritual and religious expressions at workplace is positively associated with employee well-being, commitment, and performance (Rego and Pina e Cunha, 2008; Ferreira Vasconcelos, 2009). However, less attention has been given to the procedural dynamics of accommodating these requests.

Several researchers have adopted a legal perspective or analyzed legal proceedings to evaluate religious accommodation disputes and reactions to religious accommodation requests (e.g., Atkinson, 2000; Lund Dean et al., 2015). For example, Lund Dean and her coauthors (2014) analyzed 83 US Circuit Court of Appeals cases to determine what behaviors were most likely to be associated with workplace religious accommodation disputes. Other researchers have used a practitioner-oriented approach and identified factors that managers should consider in evaluating requests (e.g., Cash et al., 2000; Borstorff and Arlington, 2011). Finally, several authors have highlighted the interplay between legal and sociological challenges in religious accommodation in European countries (e.g., Bader et al., 2013; Shah, 2013).
While existing work has provided practical and legal guidance to managers and helped to explain workplace disputes over religion, the process of decision-making surrounding religious accommodation requests has remained largely unexplored; we still do not understand how particular managers may make decisions when confronted with religious accommodation requests (Ghumman et al., 2013).

3. Theoretical Development

We provide a descriptive model to investigate the process of managerial decision-making regarding religious accommodation requests. Our model applies to decision environments in which managerial discretion in accommodation decisions is high. Managerial discretion refers to the degree of freedom and flexibility a manager has in selecting a choice, and is higher in absence of institutional and organizational constraints (Hambrick and Finkelstein, 1987).

In the present context, managerial discretion is high when institutional mandates (e.g., legal frameworks) or organizational policies are less salient or less understood, providing space for other influences on decisions of workplace religious accommodation. Conversely, when workplace religious accommodation decisions are governed by formalized organizational policies or salient legal frameworks, managerial discretion is low. Given our focus on extralegal influences on religious accommodation decisions, decisions guided by legal regulation and organizational policies fall outside the scope of this study.

3.1. Perceptions, attitudes, and accommodation decisions

Given that managerial discretion exists in many cases, evaluation of the process of decision-making about religious accommodation requests may provide interesting insights. As depicted in Figure 1, we elaborate on the relationships between the characteristics of a situation
(i.e., request, requester, and decision-maker), a decision-maker’s beliefs or perceptions about an accommodation request, a decision-maker’s attitudes toward a request, and the ultimate decision.

The outcome of interest in our model is a behavior – specifically, does a decision-maker grant or refuse a request for religious accommodation? One of the primary determinants of behavior is attitude toward a behavior (Ajzen, 1991) which is “a psychological tendency … expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993: p. 1). We are therefore interested in attitudes toward accommodation decisions as the degree to which a request is evaluated with either favor or disfavor; as a decision-maker forms more positive attitudes about a religious accommodation request, he or she should become more likely to grant the request.¹

While attitudes are the most proximal drivers of accommodation decisions, attitudes are the result of perceptions or beliefs of a decision-maker about the object of the attitude (Ajzen, 1991), which here is the request itself. As discussed earlier, the two US-based legal considerations surrounding religious accommodation requests are the sincerity of the held belief and the undue hardship (burden) imposed by the granting of a request (EEOC, 2008). We reconceptualize these legal considerations as perceptions of the decision-maker, referred to as perceived sincerity of a request and the perceived accommodation cost imposed by a request. We argue that when managerial discretion is high, perceptions of veracity and costs associated with any request represent the fundamental bases used in appraisal of the request (e.g., Clark, 2009).

¹ We do not add an explicit proposition for the relationship between attitude and decision which is depicted with a bold dotted arrow in Figure 1.
We therefore focus on veracity and costs as the instrumental drivers of judgement related to workplace religious accommodation (e.g., Adam and Rea, 2017). When conceptualized as perceptions and separated from their American legal denotations, veracity and cost can help explain the reactions of decision-makers in a variety of cultural and legal contexts.

Perceived sincerity of a request is the perception of the decision-maker of the truthfulness of a request. Consistent with existing trust research, we view perceived sincerity as a subdimension of trust (Kaplan, 1973; Crosby et al., 1990). Trust is “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Kim et al., 2009, p. 401). Religious accommodation requests embody a trust-risk relationship between the decision-maker and the requester. Essentially, a decision-maker’s perception of the sincerity of a request represents trust in the requester and/or the request, because the veracity of a professed religious belief is difficult for the decision-maker to ascertain, and the requester must often be believed that a request is for truly religious reasons.

When the decision-maker believes that a request is sincere, he or she is more likely to develop positive attitudes toward the request than if the request was perceived as insincere, because an insincere request would be viewed as an attempt to take advantage of the decision-maker.

**Proposition 1.** The perceived sincerity of a request for religious accommodation is positively related to the decision-maker’s attitude toward the request. A decision-maker will develop more positive attitudes toward an accommodation request when there is a perception that a request is sincere.

Perceived accommodation cost is the difficulty that a decision-maker anticipates to result from granting or not granting a specific request. One of the most important factors when
evaluating a request for accommodation is “the total outlay of resources needed to grant the request” (Florey and Harrison, 2000, p. 225). In addition to resource-based considerations of costs, decision-makers must also weigh how an accommodation would affect other employees. For example, granting a request for time off for religious purposes would require another employee to change his/her schedule or work overtime to cover. Similarly, non-religious employees may feel as though the employer is favoring religious employees (Blair, 2010).

Disability accommodation research has found that the perceived cost imposed by a request is negatively related to a decision-maker’s attitudes toward the request (Florey and Harrison, 2000). Yet this consideration of the cost of accommodation must be balanced against the perceived costs of not accommodating. Religion is a central identity in many people’s self-concepts and the failure of an organization to support expression of that identity may signal that the organization does not care about employees’ well-being (Madera et al., 2012). The failure of an organization to support the well-being of its employees may lead to lower levels of employee commitment, job involvement, trust in the organization, job performance, and job satisfaction, and higher levels of burnout, stress, and employee turnover (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Thus, a decision-maker’s attitude towards a request is formed based on an overall evaluation of costs.

**Proposition 2.** The perceived accommodation cost of a request for religious accommodation is negatively related to the decision-maker’s attitude toward the request.

A decision-maker will develop less positive attitudes toward an accommodation as the perception of accommodation cost increases.

Now, we explore how characteristics of the request, the decision-maker, and the requester influence a decision-maker’s perceptions of sincerity and cost.

3.2. Characteristics of the request
3.2.1. **Magnitude and frequency of the request.** One of the most salient features of a request for accommodation is the request’s magnitude, or its size in terms of required resources or the disruption it can create (Florey and Harrison, 2000). Empirical research into disability accommodation has shown that the magnitude of a request is negatively related to a grantor’s positive psychological reactions toward the request. The larger the size of the request, the higher the real or perceived cost to the decision-maker, and the less likely that decision-maker is to react favorably to the request (Latane and Darley, 1968). Furthermore, whether the recipient of a request perceives a request to be reasonable or unreasonable is largely driven by the size of the request (Klimoski and Donahue, 1997). Finally, more frequent requests require a greater draw on available resources, and thus a decision-maker should perceive greater accommodation costs in cases of frequent requests for accommodation.

**Proposition 3.** The magnitude of the request will be positively related to the perceived accommodation cost of the request. Requests of greater magnitude increase the likelihood that the decision-maker will perceive the request as imposing high accommodation costs.

**Proposition 4.** The frequency of requests for accommodation will be positively related to the perceived accommodation cost of the request. More frequent requests increase the likelihood that the decision-maker will perceive the request as imposing high accommodation costs.

3.2.2. **Type of request.** Religious accommodation request research has identified two categories of requests – observance and manifestation. Observance requests involve time away from work for religious purposes (e.g., celebrating holidays, attending services). Manifestation requests involve the display of religious identity at work, such as wearing religious dress or praying at
work (Cash et al., 2000). The fundamental distinction is that observance requests occur away from work while manifestation requests occur at work (Lund Dean et al., 2014).

The vulnerability of a trusting party in a trust-based situation can be reduced by increasing the amount of information that is available regarding the relationship between the two parties. Three strategies have been identified in the trust literature by which a party to a relationship can gather more information and reduce vulnerability: monitoring, assurance, and corroboration (Gundlach and Cannon, 2010). In the context of request type, we focus on monitoring, which is a unilateral process whereby one party collects information to determine the veracity of a partner’s actions and promises.

The ability of a decision-maker to unilaterally collect information regarding an observance request is much lower as compared to a manifestation request, because an observance request occurs away from the workplace. However, a manifestation request takes place at work and is thus more easily monitored. A decision-maker will be more likely to perceive a manifestation request as sincere, because of the ability to gather information that will allow judgment of the veracity of the request.

**Proposition 5.** The type of request (observance vs. manifestation) will be related to the perceived sincerity of the request. Manifestation requests are more likely to be perceived as sincere than observance requests.

3.2.3. **Content of the request.** The greater detail of information contained in a request, the more likely that the decision-maker will perceive it to be sincere. The second trust information strategy, assurance (Gundlach and Cannon, 2010), is applicable to the issue of the content of a request. Assurance is bilateral, consisting of the efforts of both parties to share information concerning actions and promises. When the requester engages in assurance by
making more information about the request (e.g., location and nature of activities) available to the decision-maker, this will increase the perceived sincerity of the request (Bobocel and Zdaniuk, 2005) and decrease the vulnerability of the decision-maker in trusting the requester (Gundlach and Cannon, 2010).

**Proposition 6.** *The content of a request for religious accommodation will be related to the perceived sincerity of the request. The greater the level of detail and rationale contained in the request, the greater the likelihood that the decision-maker will perceive the request to be sincere.*

3.3. *Characteristics of the decision-maker*

3.3.1. *Universal-diverse orientation.* Attitudes of decision-makers toward differences that exist among individuals should influence their accommodation decisions. Universal-Diverse Orientation (UDO) is defined as “an attitude of awareness and acceptance of both similarities and differences that exist among people” (Miville et al., 1999, p. 291). Individuals higher in UDO are appreciative of the existence of different belief systems among members of society (Miville et al., 2004), and higher levels of UDO can result in a heightened sense of interpersonal trust between groups (Lee and Robbins, 1995). Therefore, decision-makers high on UDO should be more accepting of accommodation requests and are more likely to perceive such requests as sincere.

**Proposition 7.** *The Universal Diverse Orientation of a decision-maker will be positively related to the perceived sincerity of the request for religious accommodation.*

Individuals who are high on UDO have been found to possess higher levels of some forms of empathy (Miville et al., 2006). Empathy is a multidimensional construct that refers to
how a focal individual reacts to the observation or anticipation of the experiences of another (Davis, 1983). Although all dimensions of empathy could play a role in accommodation decision-making, one is particularly applicable. Perspective taking is a cognitive form of empathy characterized by the adoption of the psychological point of view of others. When individuals take the point of view of differently situated others, they experience increased awareness and sensitivity to the needs, interests, and feelings of the other person (Davis et al., 1996).

Individuals who are high in UDO are more likely to engage in perspective taking in interpersonal situations (Miville et al., 2006). Thus, when presented with a request for religious accommodation, they will be more likely to consider the implications of granting or not granting the request from multiple perspectives – their own perspective and that of the requester. Because of this, a high-UDO decision-maker should be more sensitive to the consequences that could result from a lack of accommodation, such as decreased commitment, increased stress, and decreased job satisfaction of the requester. Therefore, individuals who are high in UDO should perceive higher costs that could result from not granting an accommodation request.

**Proposition 8.** *The Universal Diverse Orientation of a decision-maker will be positively related to the perceived accommodation costs of the request. Decision-makers who are high in UDO will perceive the costs of failure to accommodate to be higher than would decision-makers who are low in UDO.*

3.3.2. **Demographics.** Members of racial and ethnic minorities and women tend to score higher on UDO attitudes (Strauss and Connerley, 2003), indicating an increased propensity to appreciate and accept differences between people and groups. Members of traditionally disadvantaged groups have also been shown to be more supportive of affirmative action
programs and diversity initiatives (Parker et al., 1997); this may be due to self-interest, or due to empathetic concern because these individuals can relate their own experiences to the negative treatment and outcomes faced by members of other underrepresented groups (Konrad and Linehan, 1995). In essence, individuals who can better empathize with the negative experiences of underrepresented groups are more likely to understand the consequences of non-accommodation. Therefore, decision-makers from traditionally disadvantaged groups will be more likely to perceive a request as imposing high costs if it is not granted.

**Proposition 9.** Decision-maker demographic characteristics (gender, race, religion, etc.) are related to the perceived accommodation costs of a request. Decision-makers belonging to traditionally disadvantaged groups will perceive the costs of failure to accommodate to be higher than would decision-makers not belonging to traditionally disadvantaged groups.

### 3.3.3. Previous contact.

Intergroup contact theory (ICT) holds that contact with a social group about which one holds stereotypical or prejudicial beliefs will lead to greater understanding of, and more positive beliefs about, members of the previously negatively stereotyped groups (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2011). A meta-analysis by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) reported a negative correlation between intergroup contact and prejudice, indicating that greater exposure to individuals of a certain religious group should decrease negative stereotypes of that group.

New information that one receives via contact with members of a group replaces prior information (e.g., stereotypes) and creates a new basis of judgment and evaluation (Stone and Colella, 1996). A decision-maker who has prior experience with members of a specific religion is more likely to have empathy for that religion’s members and the ability to adopt their perspective, which elevates levels of trust between in-group and out-group members (Pettigrew...
and Tropp, 2011). Therefore, previous contact with members of a religion should positively influence perceptions of a requester’s sincerity.

**Proposition 10.** There will be a positive relationship between a decision-maker’s previous contact with the religious group from which a requester comes and the perceived sincerity of a request for religious accommodation.

3.4. Characteristics of the requester

3.4.1. Religiosity. Religiosity, or the state and degree of adherence to a particular religion, encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Cornwall et al., 1986; Ferreira Vasconcelos, 2009). The cognitive dimension refers to ideology, orthodoxy, or “creedal assent” (King and Hunt, 1975), which represents an individual’s choice to adhere to a certain set of religious beliefs. The affective dimension encompasses feelings toward a religion and religious beings, objects, and institutions. The behavioral component involves the “acting out” of religion through adherence to specific rules (e.g., food etiquette and appearance) in daily life (Cornwall et al., 1986).

Prior awareness of a requester’s religion can confirm the sincerity of held belief. Employees who strictly adhere to and follow basic principles of their religion are more likely to engage in specific religion-related behaviors both in appearance and daily interactions with other employees. These behaviors may be evident via social actions or statements in the workplace or the display of religious symbols or dress. Note we are referring to those expressions of religious behavior that do not necessarily require accommodation. For example, during small talk, an employee could discuss religion-related activities engaged in over the previous weekend, or a Muslim woman might wear a hijab to work without asking (or feeling the need to ask) permission.
While one can be deeply religious without manifesting religiosity in behaviors, the affective and cognitive components of religiosity are harder to ascertain in the workplace. Thus, religiosity as religious behavior in the workplace can serve to increase the awareness of decision-makers about the religious beliefs of a requester. Such behaviors provide evidence of the sincerity of a held belief of a requester, strengthening decision-maker perceptions of sincerity of the request.

**Proposition 11.** The religiosity of the requester will be positively related to the perceived sincerity of the request. Requesters who display higher levels of religious behavior in the workplace will be more likely to be perceived by decision-makers as sincere.

3.4.2. Prior Performance. Decision-makers may lack enough information regarding the religious beliefs of the requester to make an informed accommodation decision. In such situations, instead of evaluating the sincerity of a request, a decision-maker may rely on readily available information concerning other characteristics of the requester via attribute substitution. That is, when faced with limited information and complicated decisions, decision-makers use readily available and easily processed cues to substitute for complex information processing (Kahneman and Frederick, 2004).

Prior performance levels of the requester provide salient and relevant substitute attributes. Requesters who have exhibited high levels of performance should enjoy greater trust from decision-makers because they have shown the propensity to keep promises (such as to accomplish tasks). Similarly, task-related evaluations of out-group members can replace overall evaluations, shifting focus from a salient demographic characteristic to actual performance (Stone and Colella, 1996). Thus, a decision-maker will be more likely to trust a high-performing individual and view their request as sincere.
**Proposition 12.** The prior performance of the requester will be positively related to the perceived sincerity of the request.

While prior performance may positively influence a decision-maker’s perception of the sincerity of a request, it may also harm the requester when it comes to an assessment of accommodation cost. A decision-maker is less likely to react positively to a request as the cost of that request increases (Florey and Harrison, 2000). For a high performer, a request which reduces working time will be interpreted by a decision-maker to have a higher cost than an identical request from a low-performer.

**Proposition 13.** The prior performance of the requester will be positively related to the perceived accommodation cost of the request.

4. Discussion

The topic of religion in the workplace has permeated popular culture and academic research for decades, yet the management literature surrounding workplace religious accommodation is sparse. Often, a lack of legal frameworks or insufficient organizational guidelines for workplace religious accommodation creates managerial discretion in handling these requests (e.g., Adam and Rea, 2017). Therefore, we explored a range of extra-legal psychological and relational factors that influence religious accommodation decisions.

4.1. Theoretical implications

Our framework helps to explain how and why the characteristics of a request, requester, and decision-maker influence the way managers handle religious accommodation requests. We contribute to the religious accommodation literature by focusing specifically on the decision-making process surrounding accommodation (Ghumman et al., 2013). We do not provide a
“theory” of religious accommodation decision-making per se, but instead draw on relevant research to highlight its applicability to understanding how front-line decision-makers may approach religious accommodation requests.

Another contribution of our study is our introduction of the primary drivers of accommodation request decisions, perceived sincerity and perceived accommodation cost. By reframing traditional legal bases of accommodation determinations as perceptual variables, we broaden the discussions in this area to encompass a range of national and legal contexts. We highlight the importance of trust in the conceptualization of perceived sincerity and extend the traditional resource-based definition of accommodation cost by taking the potential costs of not accommodating into consideration. By bridging seemingly disparate fields (i.e., legal and organizational research), we seek to stimulate cross-disciplinary, integrative research that will provide researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers a clearer picture of the nature of religious accommodation decisions.

Additionally, we contribute to the human resource management literature on workplace accommodation and discrimination, which has traditionally focused on variables such as race, gender, sexuality, age, and disability. Religion is important to working people throughout the world, and more and more workers desire jobs that facilitate a balance between their working and spiritual lives (e.g., Smith and Rayment, 2007). Our work encourages a more nuanced investigation of factors that impact perceptions surrounding religion in the workplace.

Our propositions can be tested using multiple methods, such as through experimental designs or field studies. Because of the methodological challenges and measurement errors associated with these approaches, adoption of a multi-method design is recommended (Brewer and Hunter, 1989).
4.2. Practical implications

Understanding factors that impact religious accommodation decisions is the first step towards building organizational cultures that embrace religious diversity, promote inclusion, and prevent religious discrimination. These are important goals, as organizations with cultures supportive of inclusion experience increased connections with diverse customers, can recruit a more highly skilled workforce, and outperform competitors (Gelb and Longacre, 2012).

Any effective intervention aimed at impacting accommodation decisions begins with learning about the factors that influence these decisions. Specifically, the psychological and relational factors that impact perceived sincerity and perceived accommodation cost can influence the decision to grant or refuse a request. Organizations should develop training programs for raising awareness regarding perceptual biases that may influence decision-making. Promoting acceptance of religious diversity and appreciation for cultural differences may drive adoption of better criteria in accommodation decisions. Indeed, previous research has suggested that diversity training can reduce reliance on irrelevant information (Galinsky and Moskowitz, 2000), which is a source of bias in decision-making. Finally, our work highlights the importance of setting clear policies regarding religious accommodation requests in order to avoid poor decisions, harmed relationships, and potential regulatory and legal consequences.

4.3. Limitations and future research

We have identified a set of factors that influence religious accommodation decisions. However, we recognize that other characteristics of requests, decision-makers, and requesters could and should be incorporated into our proposed framework by future research. For instance, the decision-maker’s social dominance orientation (e.g., Pratto et al., 1994) or big five personality dimensions could influence accommodation decision-making. In addition, research
on invisible stigma could inform understanding of the factors that influence an individual’s propensity to request an accommodation (e.g., Clair et al., 2005).

While outside of scope of our model, organizational factors such as diversity, firm size, norms for religious expression, and structure could also play a role in reactions to accommodation request. Organizational factors and institutional norms likely directly influence the extent to which organizations establish specific guidelines related to accommodation processes. Similarly, characteristics of internal communication channels and organizational structure can influence managerial awareness and motivation to acquire information about religious accommodation laws and policies.

4.4. Conclusion

We provide a starting point toward explaining how religious accommodation decisions are made. We hope that our model facilitates the identification of novel perspectives and the application of a broad range of theoretical lenses to what is an important occurrence in the daily lives of many employees and organizations.
References


**Figure 1** - A descriptive model of factors that influence religious accommodation decisions

**Decision-maker**
- Diversity Orientation
- Demographics
- Previous Contact

**Requester**
- Religiosity (behavioral)
- Prior Performance

**Request for Accommodation**
- Magnitude/Frequency
- Type (observance/manifestation)
- Content/Substance

**Our Proposed Model**
- (High Managerial Discretion)
  - Perceived Sincerity of a Request
  - Perceived Accommodation Costs
  - Attitude Towards Request
  - Accommodation Decision

**Institutional and Organizational Factors**

**Existence and Clarity of Organizational Religious Accommodation Policies**

**Outside of Study’s Scope**
- (Low Managerial Discretion)