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Enhancing Employees' Motivation to Learn and Motivation to Transfer: Does Religiosity Play Any Role?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of religiosity on employee motivation to learn and motivation to transfer in the context of the public sector in Malaysia. The data of this study was collected through a survey at two points of time. The respondents are 306 public sector employees in Malaysia, who attended a specific training program. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling. The findings reveal both religiosity and motivation to learn were significant predictors of motivation to transfer, with motivation to learn recording a higher effect than the religiosity. In addition, religiosity did significantly predict motivation to learn. The result from data analysis also reveals that the motivation to learn partially mediates the effects of religiosity on motivation to transfer. It means, the religiosity has both direct and indirect (thorough motivation to learn) effect on motivation to transfer. This study extends the literature by providing empirical evidence that religiosity of employees has a positive impact on employee motivation to learn and motivation to transfer. This study also provides empirical evidence that motivation to learn has a mediating effect on the relationship between religiosity and motivation to transfer.

Keywords

Religiosity, Motivation to Learn, Motivation to Transfer, Public Sector, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Researchers have continuously suggested that employee characteristics have an important role on motivation to transfer (Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Gegenfurtner et al., 2009b). Motivation to transfer is defined as the employees' desire, intensity and intended effort to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned

in training to their workplace (Holton, 2005). Researchers and practitioners have argued that motivation to transfer is a requirement for transfer of training to occur in an organization (Gegenfurtner et al., 2009a; Hutchins & Burke, 2007). It is due to an employee who is motivated to transfer the learned knowledge, skills and attitudes to the workplace after training will establish a goal to transfer, is committed to achieving this goal (Machin & Fogarty, 1997) and shows high intent to implement the goal (Yamkovenko & Holton, 2010). Employees with high motivation to transfer can also succeed in transferring the new learned knowledge, skills and attitudes to the workplace even if opportunities to transfer are limited (Gegenfurtner et al., 2009b).

In previous studies, a range of a specific employee characteristics that influence motivation to transfer have been identified, including employee attitudes towards training content, relatedness (Gegenfurtner et al., 2009a), readiness to learn, instrumentality (Bhatti, Battour, Sundram, & Othman, 2013), job satisfaction (Peters, Barbier, Faulx, & Hansez, 2012), job involvement, organizational commitment (Cheng & Hampson, 2008), self-efficacy (Ayres, 2005), and motivation to learn (Kontoghiorghes, 2002; Al-Eisa et al., 2009). Although findings from previous studies have provided adequate understanding for organizations about the specific employee characteristics factors that can enhance motivation to transfer, there is still limited understanding about the role of another employee characteristic known as religiosity on motivation to transfer.

Religiosity can be described as the employee commitment to the empirical and theoretical fundamentals of the religion (Al-Goaib, 2003; Schaffer, 1996). Religiosity is different with spirituality because the latter is perceived as an intimate connection to the mystical (Koenig et al., 2012). Religiosity also is different with religion because the latter refers to the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods. Religiosity is regarded as nonvisible demographic characteristics that could reflect the values and beliefs of individual in the organization (Thomson, 2015). Therefore, exploring the effect of religiosity on employees in organization is an important research direction (Thomson, 2015).

It has been hypothesized previously that employee characteristic to have a direct influence on motivation to transfer (Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Gegenfurtner et al., 2009b). As religiosity is regarded as one aspect of employee characteristics, this study posits that it could affect their desire, intensity and intended effort to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their workplace.

In addition, this study also will examine the relationship between religiosity and employee motivation to learn because employee characteristic has been hypothesized to have a direct influence on motivation to learn (Ayres, 2005; Mathieu & Martineau, 1997). The underlying assumption is that religiosity can improve employee desire to learn the content of the training program (motivation to learn). These relationships have, however, yet to be empirically tested in the literature. Exploring the factors that influence motivation to learn is very important because this element has been regarded as the most significant element of

the effectiveness of training program (Cannon-Bowers, Salas, Tannenbaum, & Mathieu, 1995). By having adequate understanding about the factors that influence it, organizations can plan an appropriate strategy to enhance their employees' motivation to learn, which subsequently can increase the return on training investment.

This study was conducted to address the gaps identified earlier by proposing a conceptual framework that includes religiosity, motivation to learn and motivation to transfer. To date, no study has been identified to address such relationships, particularly on the effect of religiosity on motivation to transfer and motivation to learn. Most of previous studies have focused on examining the impact of religiosity on another aspect of human resources such as job performance (Osman-Gani, Hashim, & Ismail, 2013), work values (Yeganeh, 2015), employees' well being (Achour & Boerhannoeddin, 2011), commitment (Imran, Abdul Hamid, & Aziz, 2017), organizational citizenship behavior (Darto, Setyadi, Riadi, & Hariyadi, 2015) and life satisfaction (Sholihin, Hardivizon, Wanto, & Saputra, 2022).

The conceptual framework has been examined in the context of public sector organizations in Malaysia. The rationale for testing the proposed model in the context of public sector organizations in Malaysia is based on the fact that previous studies on motivation to transfer have mostly been conducted in private sector organizations (Curado, Henriques, & Ribeiro, 2015; Grohmann, Beller, & Kauffeld, 2014). Therefore, there is need to extend the understanding about motivation to transfer issue in the context of public sector organizations because the goals, systems, and work values in this context are different with private sector organizations (Buelens & Broeck, 2007). These differences could have a significant impact on employees (Zumrah, 2015).

In addition, previous research on motivation to transfer has mostly been conducted in Western countries (Curado et al., 2015; Grohmann et al., 2014). As a consequence, the main corpus of work on motivation to transfer has to date referred only to Western cultural contexts and therefore our understanding of this issue in other contexts, particularly Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, is still limited (Baharim, 2008).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews the literature on the interrelationships between religiosity, motivation to learn, and motivation to transfer. This is then followed by a description of the research method, an illustration of the analysis results, discussion of the findings, implication of the study, and finally the limitations and further research are presented.

2. Literature Review and Development of Hypotheses

2.1. The Relationship between Religiosity, Motivation to Transfer and Motivation to Learn

It has been suggested that the employee characteristics can influence motivation

to transfer (Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Gegenfurtner et al., 2009b; Massenberg, Schulte, & Kauffeld, 2017), and motivation to learn (Ayres, 2005; Colquitt et al., 2000; Facteau et al., 1995; Mathieu & Martineau, 1997). Based on this argument, there is a possibility that religiosity could lead to employee desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their workplace (motivation to transfer) and to learn the content of the training program (motivation to learn). The theoretical relationship between religiosity, motivation to learn and motivation to transfer, can also be adequately explained from a needs fulfillment perspective. In accordance with Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory, one aspect that contributes to human motivation is self-actualization. Self-actualization refers to a state in which an individual experiences complete emotional fulfillment (Quatro, 2004). According to Achour and colleagues (2015), an individual will experiences complete emotional fulfillment when he or she shows commitment to the empirical and theoretical fundamentals of the religion (religiosity).

In addition, previous studies reveal that when employees show commitment to the empirical and theoretical fundamentals of the religion (religiosity), they demonstrated positive feeling and attitude such as life satisfaction (Sholihin, Hardivizon, Wanto, & Saputra, 2022), job satisfaction (Achour et al., 2015; Tiliouine & Belgoumidi, 2009), higher well-being (Hoogeveen et al., 2022), less anxiety (Abdel-Khalek, 2010) and stress (Kandaswamy, 2007). Moreover, researchers have continuously argue that employee characteristic to have an influence on motivation to transfer (Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Gegenfurtner et al., 2009b) and motivation to learn (Ayres, 2005; Mathieu & Martineau, 1997). On the basis of the above, this study argues there is a possibility that employee religiosity could lead to employee motivation to transfer and motivation to learn. Therefore the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Religiosity will be positively related to motivation to transfer.

Hypothesis 2: Religiosity will be positively related to motivation to learn.

2.2. The Relationship between Motivation to Learn and Motivation to Transfer

Researchers in the field of training have consistently suggested that motivation to learn might have a direct and positive effect on motivation to transfer (Gegenfurtner et al., 2009b). The previous indications would suggest that if employees have a desire to learn the content of the training program, they are more likely to have a desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their workplace. This assumption has been supported by a number of empirical studies conducted in various organizations (e.g., Kontoghiorghes, 2002; Al-Eisa et al., 2009). One possible reason is due to employees with higher levels of motivation to learn demonstrate positive reaction toward the training program and acquire knowledge during the training (Bauer et al., 2016). In addition, employees with higher levels of motivation to learn also may perform during training better than their less motivated counterparts (Al-Eisa et al., 2009).

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According to Liebermann and Hoffmann (2008), employees who perform during training (i.e. gaining new knowledge, skills and attitudes from the training), their intention to practice the new learned knowledge, skills and attitudes to their workplace should increase. On this basis, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3: Motivation to learn is positively related to motivation to transfer Based on the previous hypotheses, below is a research framework of this study (see Figure 1). In this framework, religiosity is regarded as antecedent for motivation to learn and motivation to transfer. Motivation to learn also is regarded as antecedent for motivation to transfer. Finally, motivation to learn is regarded as mediator in the relationship between religiosity and motivation to transfer.

3. Method

3.1. Sample

This study was conducted in a public sector organization in Malaysia. Purposive sampling technique has been used to select the sample for this study. In specific, the employees of public sector, who attended a specific training program have participated in this study. Using the trainees of one specific type of training as the study sample has been applied by most of the empirical training research (Chen, Holton, & Bates, 2006). This is due, in part, to the fact that each training type has its own specific content and objectives, which may have difference influence on trainees (Laker & Powell, 2011).

This study utilizes survey research. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), using surveys or questionnaires is an efficient data collection strategy when the researcher knows exactly what is required and how to measure the variables of interest (p. 197). This approach also enables researchers to generalize the findings from a sample of responses to the sample population (Creswell, 1994). The survey has been distributed at two points of time. Time one at the beginning of the training that consist of questions related to religiosity and motivation to learn. While time two at the end of the training, which consist a questions related to motivation to transfer. A total of 308 questionnaires was collected. However, only 306 questionnaires contained complete data. The other 2 questionnaires have been eliminated due to incomplete (few questions have not been
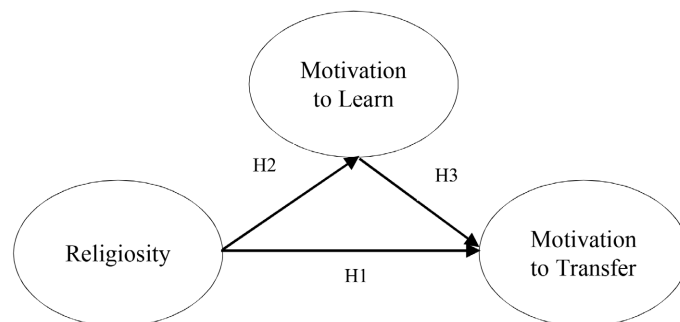

Figure 1. The research framework.

answered by respondents).

Among the respondents, 63 percent (n = 193) were male and 37 percent (n = 113) were female. 76 percent (n = 231) are still single, while 24 percent (n = 75) of them have married. In term of age, the majority, 86 percent (n = 264) of them are between 20 - 30 years old, 12 percent (n = 37) are between 31 - 40 years old, and only 2 percent (n = 5) of them are between 41 - 50 years old. In term of education level, 50 percent (n = 153) of them are diploma holder, 37 percent (n = 111) of them hold a secondary school certificate, and 13 (n = 42) percent of them are degree holder. All of them are Muslim. Table 1 summarizes the sample characteristic.

3.2. Measure

This study used previously published measures. All measures were assessed using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree).

This study seeks to measure religiosity in an Islamic context. Therefore, religiosity was measured using 9 items developed by Achour, Grine, Mohd Nor and Mohd Yusoff (2015). An example of the items is 'Religion is important to me because it helps me to cope with life events'. The measure was validated in a recent study by Achour et al. (2015). Cronbach's alpha for the scale in this study was 0.95.

Employee motivation was measured using the nine-item scale from Baharim (2008). Specifically, motivation to learn was measured using four items, while motivation to transfer was measured using four items. An example of the items is 'I am definitely interested to join this training' (motivation to learn), 'I will put into practice what I have learned from the training to the workplace' (motivation to transfer). The measure was validated in a study by Baharim (2008). Cronbach's alpha for these scales in this study was 0.94 for motivation to transfer, and

Table 1. Sample characteristic.

No.	Characteristic	Details	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Gender	Male	193	63
		Female	113	37
2.	Status	single	231	76
		Married	75	24
3.	Age	20 - 30 years old	264	86
		31 - 40 years old	37	12
		41 - 50 years old	5	2
4.	Education level	Bachelor's degree	42	13
		Diploma	153	50
		Secondary school certificate	111	37

0.85 for motivation to learn.

4. Analysis Results

The data of this study have been analyzed through structural equation modeling technique. This technique allowed assessment of how well the model fitted the data of this study. This technique also enables the analysis of latent variables and their relationships simultaneously without measurement error, which produces an accurate result (Nachtigall, Koehne, Funke, & Steyer, 2003). As recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), this study estimated a measurement model using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) prior to examining the structural model relationships.

The measurement model that included all items showed a good fit. For example, the value of chi-square (χ^2)/degrees of freedom (*df*) is 3.988. According to previous researchers (e.g., Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; Williams, Vandenberg, & Edwards, 2009), the score of χ^2/df between 2 and 5can justify the good fit of a particular model. The comparative fit index (CFI) also showed acceptable value, which is 0.917. In addition, the value of the standardized root mean residual (SRMR) achieves acceptable value (0.052), which is below 0.10. According to Hair et al. (2010) and Williams et al. (2009), SRMR value less than 0.10 is considered a good model.

Based on Table 2, the composite reliability and the Cronbach's alpha provide evidence of internal consistency. In addition, all indicators loaded strongly and significantly on their respective factors, and the standardized loadings ranged from 0.611 to 0.937. The result of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each variable has also exceeded 50 percent, indicating the convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair et al., 2010). Moreover, Table 3 shows that the square roots of AVE estimates are greater that the corresponding interconstruct correlations estimates, indicating discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2010).

After estimating the measurement model with a confirmatory factor analysis, the second stage of analysis involved estimating the proposed relationships. As demonstrated in Table 4, all the fit indices suggest a reasonable fit between the model and the data. The results of the analyses are presented in Figure 2. The results indicate that religiosity is positively related to motivation to learn (path coefficient = +0.426, critical ratio = 5.787, $p < 0.001$) and motivation to transfer (path coefficient = +0.315, critical ratio = 5.583, $p < 0.001$). In other words, the findings indicate that employee commitment to the empirical and theoretical fundamentals of the religion can facilitate the employee desire to learn the content of the training program, and to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their workplace at the end of the training program. In addition, the analysis result also shows that motivation to learn is positively related to motivation to transfer (path coefficient = +0.551, critical ratio = 8.281, $p < 0.001$). This result means employees who have a desire to learn the content of the training program, they will show desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and

attitudes learned in training to their workplace. These results support hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 of the study. Further analysis has been conducted to test whether motivation to learn has a role as a mediator between religiosity and motivation to

Table 2. Standardized measurement coefficients resulting from CFA.

	Religiosity	Motivation to Transfer	Motivation to Learn
Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)	0.95	0.94	0.85
Composite reliability	0.94	0.94	0.86
Average variance extracted	0.63	0.80	0.60
Item abbreviation			
RELIGI1	0.611		
RELIGI2	0.801		
RELIGI3	0.810		
RELIGI4	0.817		
RELIGI5	0.839		
RELIGI6	0.865		
RELIGI7	0.797		
RELIGI8	0.752		
RELIGI9	0.820		
MTT1		0.858	
MTT2		0.937	
MTT3		0.915	
MTT4		0.859	
MTL1			0.635
MTL2			0.777
MTL3			0.855
MTL4			0.820

Notes: N = 306, χ^2 = 462.622, df = 116, p < 0.000, χ^2/df = 3.988, CFI = 0.917, SRMR = 0.052. All are significant (p < 0.001).

Table 3. Means, standard deviation and correlation matrix.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*REGI*	*MTT*	*MTL*
REGI	4.77	0.39	**0.793**		
MTT	4.51	0.53	0.549**	**0.893**	
MTL	4.33	0.60	0.426**	0.685**	**0.777**

Notes: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; REGI = religiosity; MTT = motivation to transfer; MTL = motivation to learn. The square root of AVE value mark with bold. ** = p < 0.001.

Table 4. Structural model goodness-of-fit statistics.

Fit Indices	Value
Chi-square χ² (p-value)	462.622 (p < 0.000)
Degree of freedom (df)	116
Normed Chi-square (χ²/df)	3.988
Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.917
Standardized root mean residual (SRMR)	0.052
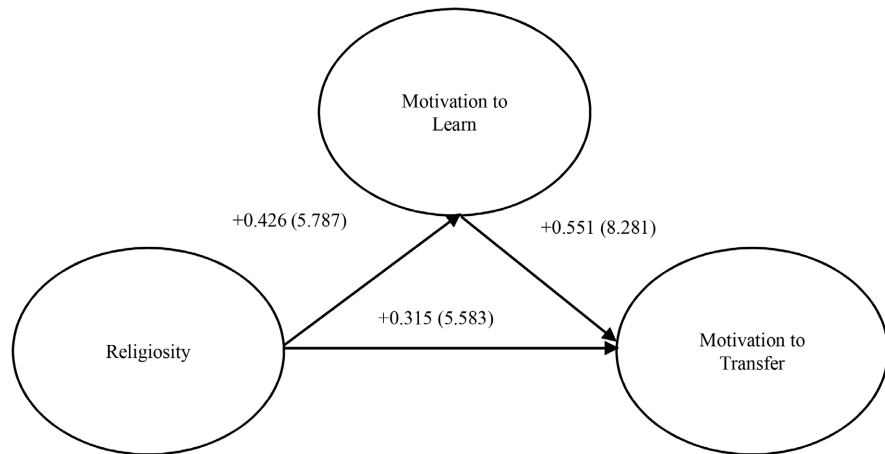
Notes: Figures are regression coefficients followed by critical ration value. The critical ratio value indicates the significant level of regression coefficients. The minimum critical ratio value of 1.960 is required for the regression coefficients to be significant (Byrne 2010). ***p < 0.001.

Figure 2. The result of structural model analysis.

Result summary.

No.	Hypothesis	Result
1.	Religiosity will be positively related to motivation to transfer	Supported
2.	Religiosity will be positively related to motivation to learn	Supported
3.	Motivation to learn is positively related to motivation to transfer	Supported (Partially Mediate)

transfer. The steps outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) using SPSS were followed. First, religiosity was positively and significantly related to motivation to transfer (β = 0.523, p < 0.001). Thus, the first condition of mediation was met. Second, religiosity was positively and significantly related to motivation to learn (β = 0.397, p < 0.001). Third, motivation to learn was positively and significantly related to motivation to transfer (β = 0.706, p < 0.001). Finally, the effect of religiosity on motivation to transfer is still significant even after controlling the effect of motivation to learn (β = 0.288, p < 0.001). The previous results confirmed that motivation to learn has partially mediated the relationship between religiosity and motivation to transfer. The Sobel test was performed to examine whether

the indirect effect of religiosity on the motivation to transfer is statistically significant. The result shows that the test statistic is significant (Z-value of 6.92, $p <$ 0.001). The Sobel test result provides additional support that the relationship between religiosity and motivation to transfer is mediated by the motivation to learn. A discussion of the findings is presented in the following section.

5. Discussion

Religiosity is an employee characteristic that has an important role on employees in organization. However, there is still a lack of studies have analyzed the role of religiosity on employee motivation, particularly the employee motivation to learn and motivation to transfer. Thus, this study is conducted addressed these gaps by examining the relationships between religiosity, motivation to learn and motivation to transfer in the context of public sector organization in Malaysia.

This study has found a positive and significant relationship between religiosity, employee motivation to learn and motivation to transfer. These results suggest that the religiosity can facilitate the employee desire to learn the content of the training program, and also can encourage employee desire, intensity and intended effort to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their workplace. A possible reason is due to the employee, who have the element of religiosity perceive kindness as one of the key dimensions of religion. This notion will encourage the employee to engage in behavior (in this study refer to motivation to learn and motivation to transfer) that can produce positive outcome to the organization. These findings are important outcomes that have not been empirically determined previously in training and religiosity literature. These findings help to clarify and support the previous argument indicating that the elements inside the employee (in this study refer to religiosity) has an important role in the development of employee motivation to learn and motivation to transfer (Ayres, 2005; Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Gegenfurtner et al., 2009b; Mathieu & Martineau, 1997). Specifically, this study extends the literature by providing empirical evidence that religiosity of employees in the public sector organizations in Malaysia has a positive impact on employee motivation to learn and motivation to transfer the training outcomes.

In addition, this study provides empirical evidence that links motivation to learn and motivation to transfer. In other word, this study has confirmed that when employees have a desire to learn the content of the training program, they will show desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their workplace at the end of the training program. This finding provides cross-validation of past empirical findings related to the positive effect of motivation to learn on motivation to transfer that previously related to organizations in Western (Kontoghiorghes, 2002) and Middle East (Al-Eisa et al., 2009) settings.

In summary, this study provides empirical evidence about the important role of religiosity as a factor that can foster employee motivation to learn and ultimately employee motivation to transfer the training outcomes in the workplace.

6. Conclusion

This study has provided empirical evidence about the role of religiosity to the development of employee motivation to learn and motivation to transfer the training outcomes in the workplace. The result supports the importance of religiosity in producing positive behavior (motivation to learn, motivation to transfer) among employees and demonstrates the applicability of this concept to non-Western settings, and to the public sector more generally. Based on these findings, the management of organizations encourages to include activities or programs that can enhance employee commitment to the empirical and theoretical fundamentals of the religion in the organization yearly schedule or planning. For example, in the context of public sector organization in Malaysia (which majority of the employees are Muslim), the management team can organize a public lecture during Muslim festivals (e.g., fasting in the month of Ramadhan) to enhance the employees' commitment to implement one of pillars in Islam. For non-Muslim employees, the management of the public sector can allow them to take leave during their religious festivals (e.g., Christmas Day for Christian and Chinese New Year for Buddhist), so that they can fulfill their ritual obligation. This study has proven that if organization implements these practices, they can enhance the employee motivation to learn the content of the training program, and ultimately improve employee desire to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in training to their workplace at the end of the training program. From the society perspective, the finding of this study, specifically in regard to religiosity can be regard as useful information to enhance the quality of life among society. The leaders of the society are encouraged to provide adequate facility for each religion such as the mosque (for Muslim), church (for Christian), temple (for Buddhist) etc. These facilities can motivate the society to fulfill their ritual obligation, which consequently can produce a positive behavior and environment in the society.

The sample in this study consists of employees in the public sector in Malaysia. Future research could examine the proposed conceptual framework of this study among different types of organization (e.g., the private sector) or community or society to validate the findings of this study.

This study has not controlled the effect of other factors on the relationship between religiosity, motivation to transfer and motivation to learn. Future research could re-examine the relationships found in this study by controlling the effect of other factors, for example, the obedience to authority. It is because religious individuals could be more obedient. Individuals who are obedience are more likely to be committed to their organization. Other factors that can be controlled are individual characteristics such as gender, and traits such as conscientiousness and organizational commitment.

Finally, this study is limited to a single context, which is Malaysia. Future research is encouraged to validate the proposed framework of this study that includes religiosity, motivation to learn and motivation to transfer, in another

context. It is because every country is unique in terms of environmental characteristics and culture.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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