

RELIGIOSITY LEVEL AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE BUSINESS LEADERS: STUDIES USING VALUES HIERARCHY

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ABSTRACT

We explore subjects' moral development in conjunction with religion. Data from 1207 management students from five countries was collected; each subject declared his/her religion type and level of religiosity. Findings indicate that more religious people achieve higher levels of moral development than those who are less religious. We then propose the use of Schwartz's values hierarchy to measure subjects' levels of moral development according to Kohlberg's Theory to compare to subjects' levels of religiosity. Our research helps identify what cultural values are most likely to lead to higher levels of moral development and how religion helps to shape those values. We contribute to the literature by offering our vision of a circular model wherein we find that values influence moral development, which influences religion, which influences values in a continuous cycle.

INTRODUCTION

Cultures are converging as a result of rapid globalization. This research is aimed at bringing additional logical and empirical evidence to support connections between moral development, ethics and culture as reflected in levels of religiosity in multiple cultures. We posit that level of moral development, coupled with cultural characteristic is a better measure of one's morality than the number of ethics courses students may have completed. Leisinger (2015: 13) notes: "culturally determined differences can be associated with substantial normative differences. They therefore can result in apparent variations in judgments about what ought to be considered as desirable, fair, just or responsible." Thus, knowledge of cultural characteristics and normative differences can be useful to managers looking for more ethical employees.

KOHLBERG'S WORK

Lawrence Kohlberg conducted examinations of moral development using young boys. One of the initial goals of his experiments was to empirically isolate sequential stages in the development of the subjects' moral thought patterns. After consideration of individual cases, six stages of moral development are identified according to value orientation (Kohlberg, 1963; Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977). See Table 1 for a summary of Kohlberg's stages of moral development.

Table 1: An Early and a Refined Description of Kohlberg’s Levels of Moral Development

Level and Stage	Defining Characteristics
Level 1, Stage 1: Punishment and Obedience Orientation	Actions that merit punishment are morally incorrect
Level 1, Stage 2: Instrument and Relativity Orientation	Use of others to attain ends is morally correct: naïve instrumental hedonism
Level 2, Stage 3: Interpersonal Concordance Orientation	Conformity to friends’/family’s morality is morally correct: good-boy/girl morality is maintenance of good relations and approval of others
Level 2, Stage 4: Law and Order Orientation	Conformity to the larger society’s morality is morally correct: authority determines morality
Level 3, Stage 5: Social Contract Orientation	Agreement to disagree about moral differences is morally correct: morality is a result of social contract theory and democratically accepted law
Level 3, Stage 6: Universal Orientation	All agree as to what is morally correct: morality is a matter of individual principles of conscience

These developmental types of value-orientation were not identified on the basis of an articulated value hierarchy, but on the basis of processes of moral reasoning. Kohlberg’s theory is described as “moral reasoning theory” and the value orientation types he finds are identified as “moral reasoning stages.” For each boy, researchers calculate scores using a percentage of all the boy’s statements that are of a given type, such that each child has a profile with the percentages of his responses as related to each of the six types of moral reasoning. Ultimately, Kohlberg views the six stages as forming an “invariant developmental sequence in which attainment of an advanced stage is dependent on the attainment of each of the preceding stages (Rest, Turiel, Kohlberg, 1969: 226).”

RELIGIOSITY AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT

According to Ramasamy, Yeung and Au (2010), religiosity provides the background for ethical evaluation and influences one’s attitude and behavior. Researchers study differences in moral development between religious and nonreligious people in numerous contexts (see Day, 2017). Further, the DIT (Rest, Thoma, Narvaez and Bebeau, 1997) was used frequently in such research: “Christian populations scored at approximately the national average. Many other studies have shown Christians to score below average (Sabin, 2006: 13).” Other research includes that by Tatum, Foubert, Fuqua and Ray (2013), who study the relationship between first year college men’s religious affiliation and their moral development using the DIT Short Form. Results indicate that those with no stated religious preference had significantly higher *P* scores ($M = 45.2$) than respondents who identified as Roman Catholic ($M = 36.1$) or as Protestant ($M = 38.6$). According to Day (2017: 300), “multifactorial assessments involving thousands of subjects, across cultural settings, show religious beliefs and commitments, and belonging to a religious community, among the best predictors, of life satisfaction and a sense of well-being in adulthood, sense of personal efficacy and control, and successful coping with life difficulties.”

VALUES AND VALUES GROUPS ACCORDING TO SCHWARTZ

“Culture has been identified as one of the important determinants of business ethical decision-making. Culture influences ethical decision-making both directly and indirectly by interacting with

other variables (Christie, Kwon, Stoeberl and Baumhart, 2003: 266).” Thus, it is important to identify which variables influence culture, thereby influencing ethical decision-making processes: age, gender, education, field of study, etc. Bartels (1967) suggests a number of cultural factors more broadly applicable: law, concepts of property rights relationships between individuals and governments and nationality. Respect for individuals, power/authority ideals, religion, values, customs and mores are factors more individually oriented. Since “(c)ulture has a strong influence on the ethical attitudes of business managers (Christie, *et al.*, 2003: 279),” it is impossible to separate out culture from ethics: ethics are bound in culture and culture is shaped by ethical beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviors (Jackson, 2001). Given that ethics is not only reflective of culture, but that ethics and culture have a continuous and continuously developing impact on each other, we must categorize values and cultural characteristics so that we can examine how culture and ethics relate to one another. This is particularly true as it pertains to personal characteristics of workers in the international arena such as age, gender or education, etc.

Schwartz proposes two groups of values: terminal values (30 items, which describe end states of existence, the goals that a person wishes to achieve in his/her lifetime) and instrumental values (26 items, which are preferable ways of behaving or means of achieving terminal values) (Struch, Schwartz and van der Kloot, 2002). Schwartz not only develops a list of values but also proposes optimal configurations of values and builds ten value groups (self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, universalism – Figure 1, presented forthwith) using multidimensional scaling analysis (Schwartz, 1992; Sagiv and Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz and Sipke, 1995). Schwartz initially developed the SVS questionnaire in which he asks “As a guiding principle in my life, this value is ...” giving nine different answer options. Subsequently, he develops the PVQ questionnaire in which he uses descriptions of different people and asks how much each person is or is not like you.

Schwartz’s values are grouped into four categories and then, within each category, are refined. Self-transcendence includes the values of universalism and benevolence, reflecting values of appreciation, tolerance, equal protection and the preservation of the welfare of others. In opposition to those ideals, self-enhancement reflects values of personal achievement and the attainment of power. Openness to change is in contrast to conservation goals: openness to change is marked by self-direction, stimulation and hedonism, while conservation goals are noted for interests in security, tradition and conformity. See Table 2 for a brief description of Schwartz’s values presentation.

Table 2: Schwartz’s Value Categories

<p>Self-transcendence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universalism: selfish interests are put aside in the protection of others • Benevolence: the welfare of others is most important 	<p>Self-enhancement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement: marked by pride in one’s accomplishment and competency • Power: attainment of one’s own ends is paramount
<p>Openness to change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-direction: one’s thought and actions are independent • Stimulation: one is open to the excitement and novelty of risk-taking • Hedonism: one seeks to find pleasure out of life 	<p>Conservation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security: safety and harmony are valued • Tradition: respect for and acceptance of customs or rules • Conformity: disruptive behaviors are restrained

METHODOLOGY

According to Schwartz, people differ from the point of view of value systems. Kohlberg creates a general model describing the moral development of man. According to the Kohlberg theory, as people develop, they move from lower to higher levels of moral development. The Kohlberg model is also based on values, but they are not clearly defined here (this is not the subject of this research). Our approach is based on the combination of these two perspectives. We use Schwartz's value systems to determine the Kohlberg's levels of moral development.

In our opinion, six values (self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power and security) can be located at Stage 2 of moral development, one value (benevolence) can be located at Stage 3, two values (tradition and conformity) can be located at Stage 4 and one value (universalism) can be located at Stage 5. This is illustrated schematically on Figure 1. Values that can be located at particular level of moral development are very close to each other in the Schwartz theory. Moving to the higher level in Kohlberg's theory generally means moving contra clockwise in Schwartz's theory.

Figure 1. Joining Kohlberg's Theory and Schwartz's Theory

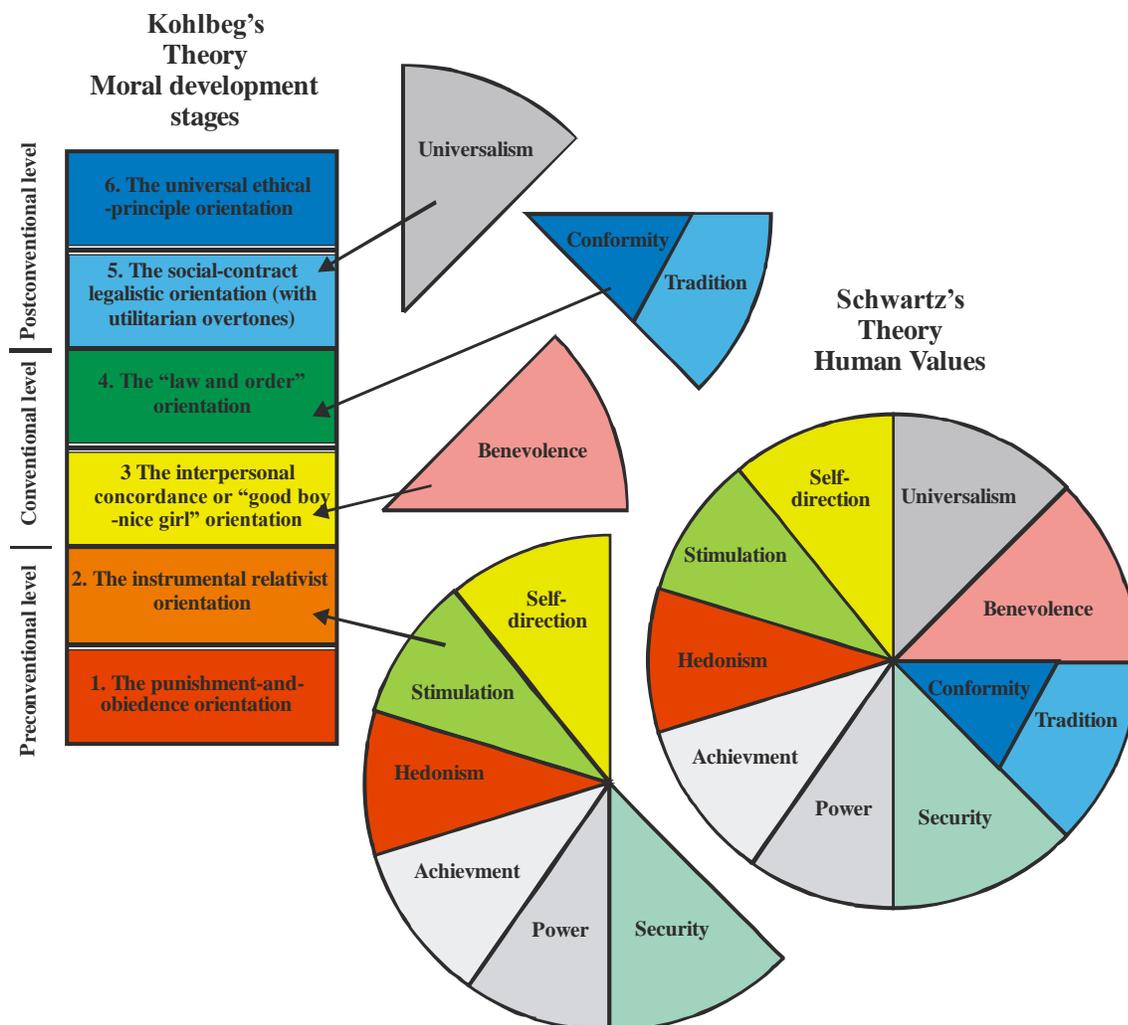


Figure 1 suggests that there are some discrepancies between the two theories. Most of the values identified by Schwartz can be located at the second level of moral development as defined by Kohlberg. No single value defined by Schwartz fits into first stage of moral development. The reason for this discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that Kohlberg's theory originated with relatively young people – children. Schwartz, on the other hand, develops his theory on the basis of adult responses. No one of Schwartz's value fits well with Kohlberg's sixth Stage. In this case, the reason may be that Stage 6 is generally an abstract construct not experimentally confirmed. Indeed, Kracher and Marble (2007) note that research has found that it is difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate between Kohlberg's Stages 5 and 6; additionally, there is a question of whether there need be a distinction (Rest, 1997).

In our studies, we use Schwartz's PVQ as a novel solution which enables us to collect data from a large pool of subjects. As a result of connecting the two theories of Schwartz and Kohlberg, we can use the value hierarchy of a particular person to assess his or her level of moral development.

Moral Development Index

According to Kohlberg and Hersh (1977: 54), stages of moral development are "hierarchical integrations." Thinking at a higher stage includes within it the lower stage thinking. There is a tendency to function at or prefer the highest stage available. Rest, *et al.* (1997: 499) present a similar opinion: "one person is not confined to one stage." Therefore, in our studies, we develop Moral Development Indexes (*MDIs*) which take into account how a person rates every value and also every stage of moral development. In fact, we develop two different indexes: *MDI*₁ and *MDI*₂.

$$MDI_1 = \frac{r_2 + 2r_3 + 3r_4 + 4r_5}{r_2 + r_3 + r_4 + r_5} \quad (1)$$

where:

*MDI*₁ – Moral Development Index

*r*_{*i*} = average rating for a particular stage of moral development in gradations 1-4; "How much described person is like you." *i* = 2, 3, 4, 5. Note that the average takes into account the differing number of questions in PVQ for assessing each stage (12, 2, 4 and 3 portraits).

The *MDI*₁ index is constructed so that the higher stages of Kohlberg's levels of moral development are of higher importance (2, 3, 4). This indicator can be calculated for each person who completes the PVQ. The second index possess the following form:

$$MDI_2 = 3(r_5 - r_2) + 2(r_5 - r_3) + (r_5 - r_4) + 2(r_4 - r_2) + (r_4 - r_3) + (r_3 - r_2) \quad (2)$$

The *MDI*₂ score weights the differences between individual scores for each moral stage. The *MDI*₂ value can be positive or negative, with positive values showing higher moral development and negative values showing a hedonistic preference.

Because earlier research studies referenced show no differences between moral development of religious and nonreligious people we can formulate hypothesis:

H1: There is no difference according moral development stage between religious and nonreligious people.

Kohlberg and Hersh (1977: 54) write: “We are concerned with the traditional prohibition of schools from teaching values or morality normally felt to be the province of the home and church.” This statement suggests that if church organizations correctly fulfill their missions, then more religious people should be at higher levels of moral development than those less religious. Therefore, we can propose the second hypothesis:

H2. More religious people are at the higher moral development stage than less religious.

In our opinion every religion positively influences moral development, therefore we can propose the third hypothesis:

H3. Moral development stage does not depend on religion type.

In order to verify our hypothesis, we used data from five different countries located on three continents – see Table 3. Our respondents were business students who completed PVQ declaring five religion types.

Table 3: Religiosity Structure

Religion type	Poland		Bulgaria		Italy		Taiwan		Total	
1. Catholic	613	93,30%	4	3,57%	68	81,93%	8	3,31%	693	63,35%
2. Protestant	1	0,15%	4	3,57%	1	1,20%	11	4,55%	17	1,55%
3. Christian orthodox	9	1,37%	65	58,04%	1	1,20%	2	0,83%	77	7,04%
4. Muslim	0	0,00%	9	8,04%	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	9	0,82%
5. Buddhists	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	56	23,14%	56	5,12%
6. Other religion	10	1,52%	7	6,25%	1	1,20%	37	15,29%	55	5,03%
7. No religion	24	3,65%	23	20,54%	12	14,46%	128	52,89%	187	17,09%
Total	657	100.00%	112	100.00%	83	100.00%	242	100.00%	1094	100.00%

In order to verify H1 we compare *MDI* of people who declare religiosity and those who declare no religiosity. Results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Comparing Moral Development Levels Among Religious and Nonreligious People

	Grouping whole population	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<i>MDI</i> ₁	1. Religious people	1020	2.47758504	.084926994	.002659167
	2. Nonreligious people	187	2.47557227	.097250855	.007111687
<i>MDI</i> ₂	1. Religious people	1020	-1.41029412	5.823713992	.182347558
	2. Nonreligious people	187	-1.42780749	6.181734889	.452053226

t-test for Equality of Means

	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
<i>MDI</i> ₁	.265	240.787	.791	.002012778	.007592579	-.012943579	.016969134
<i>MDI</i> ₂	.036	250.244	.971	.017513369	.487445126	-.942504469	.977531206

Results suggest that there is no difference in level of moral development between religious and non-religious people.

In order to verify hypothesis H2. We compared MDI_1 and MDI_2 for people who declared High (1). Medium (2) and Low (3) religiosity. Results of means comparison are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Religiosity Level and Moral Development

Religiosity level		<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
MDI_1	High	174	2.49399143	.078355355	.005940104	2.175258	2.710843
	Medium	574	2.47997077	.082660621	.003450188	2.075145	2.800000
	Low	271	2.46086712	.092340374	.005609278	2.127517	2.704545
	Total	1019	2.47728432	.085289862	.002671839	2.075145	2.800000
MDI_2	High	174	-.24425287	5.559124797	.421436163	-21.000000	17.500000
	Medium	574	-1.27700348	5.744935769	.239788986	-24.500000	18.000000
	Low	271	-2.48154982	6.001668826	.364575418	-18.500000	12.500000
	Total	1019	-1.42100098	5.824959048	.182476013	-24.500000	18.000000

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
MDI_1	Between Groups	.126	2	.063	8.776	.000
	Within Groups	7.280	1016	.007		
	Total	7.405	1018			
MDI_2	Between Groups	557.657	2	278.829	8.336	.000
	Within Groups	33983.233	1016	33.448		
	Total	34540.891	1018			

Results obtained using both indicators MDI_1 and MDI_2 suggest that there are statistically significant differences in moral development between people who declared different religiosity level 1- high, 2- medium, 3- low. Therefore, we can say that people who declare higher religiosity level (or are at the higher religiosity level) are at a higher stage of moral development than people who declare low religiosity level. When we check these differences for every religiosity group, we obtained significant differences only for Catholics, probably because other groups were too small to show statistically significant differences.

In order to verify H3, we took into consideration five different religions types. Some people declared also “other religion” and some “no religion.” From the USA, we did not have data concerning religion type; therefore, in Table 4 there are only four countries.

When we compare MDI_1 for people declaring different religion types we obtain the results shown in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6: Religion Type and MDI_1

Religion type	<i>N</i>	MDI_1	Standard deviation	One-way ANOVA					
				Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	<i>F</i>	Significance	
1. Catholic	693	2.47166592	.086457243						
2. Protestant	17	2.53213851	.056150638	Between groups	.100	6	.017	2.211	.040
3. Christian orthodox	77	2.47732611	.087673211	Within groups	8.179	1087	.008		
4. Muslim	9	2.48225145	.042270813	Total	8.279	1093			

5. Buddhists	56	2.48780807	.052394855	Strong tests of means equality					
6. Other religion	55	2.49718947	.091061410		Statistic		df1	df2	Significance
7. No religion	187	2.47466899	.097251845	Welch	3.861		6	71.939	.002
Total	1094	2.47571388	.087033476	Brown-Forsythe	3.017		6	333.698	.007

Table 7: Religion Type and MDI_2

Religion type	N	MDI_2	Standard deviation	One-way ANOVA					
					Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Significance
1. Catholic	693	-1.81818182	5.852422910						
2. Protestant	17	2.41176471	4.191640841	Between groups	490.862	6	81.810	2.411	.025
3. Christian orthodox	77	-1.47402597	6.064833980	Within groups	36880.384	1087	33.929		
4. Muslim	9	-1.27777778	2.948634335	Total	37371.245	1093			
5. Buddhists	56	-.75892857	3.636920615	Strong tests of means equality					
6. Other religion	55	.03636364	6.358760758		Statistic		df1	df2	Significance
7. No religion	187	-1.49732620	6.187808280	Welch	3.536		6	71.516	.004
Total	1094	-1.52148080	5.847344797	Brown-Forsythe	3.159		6	304.789	.005

The one-way ANOVA does not indicate means differences. Strong tests of means differences indicate statistically significant difference in means. MDI_2 is more sensitive. Additionally, we conducted testing differences in mean values for different religious groups. Equal variances were not assumed. In Table 8, the difference significance values are given.

Table 8: Significance Levels of Differences Between Religiosity Groups – MDI_1 and MDI_2

Religion type	MDI_1							MDI_2						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Catholic (693)	x	.000	.592	.483	.040	.049	.702	x	.001	.637	.605	.051	.040	.525
2. Protestant (17)		x	.003	.019	.008	.063	.001		x	.003	.016	.010	.082	.002
3. Christian orthodox (77)			x	.779	.392	.212	.829			x	.872	.399	.173	.978
4. Muslim (9)				x	.730	.432	.639				x	.644	.324	.843
5. Buddhists (56)					x	.509	.190					x	.422	.268
6. Other religion (55)						x	.116						x	.117
7. No religion (187)							x							x

Comparisons show that statistically significant differences appear between Protestants and other groups. Therefore, generally speaking, we can say that the Protestants group (2) is at a higher level of moral development than other religiosity groups and those who declare “no religion.”

DISCUSSION

Our results indicate that there is no difference in levels of moral development between people who declare religiosity and those who declare no religiosity. Religiosity does not differentiate people from the point of view of level of moral development. At the same time, we can say that more religious people are at the higher stage of moral development than those less religious. This means that religiosity levels differentiate people from the point of view of levels of moral development.

Further, our results suggest that people who declare that they are Protestants are at a higher level of moral development than people who declare other religions. However, as noted in our limitations, this group was represented only by 17 people spread between many countries: this aspect of our research needs more studies. We developed and tested two measures of moral development: *MDI*₁ and *MDI*₂. They offer similar results statistical results, although *MDI*₂ is more sensitive and differentiates people to a greater extent.

From the perspective of business and management, it seems that, if we look for good employees (those with higher levels of morality), we should ask not only for qualifications, experience, and personal features, but also seek to bolster the relationships between religion, values and moral development, particularly as they relate to religiosity and religiosity level. Our results suggest that high morality is associated with high religiosity levels. Further, our results are in accordance with Day's (2017) opinion that religion plays a positive role in values like humility, generosity and tolerance. Similarly, Herzog, Harris and Pfeiffer (2018: 3) state that "(T)here is repeated evidence that prosociality is linked to religiosity." There is clearly a link between the values redolent in religious belief and/or practice and levels of moral development: our contribution to the literature is to highlight a pathway to understanding what employees value and how those values can translate into higher levels of morality and the commensurately higher levels of benefits for business and society.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

Limitations of this study can be overcome with further research. Our first limitation is that our groups from different countries and different religions are not equal. We had overrepresentation of Catholics and underrepresentation of Muslims and Protestants. There were no subjects who identified as any of the eastern religions, such as Hinduism, Judaism, Confucianism, etc. Clearly, this is a constraint on our findings for many more cultures than those we studied. A second limitation on our work is that, when comparing levels of moral development for people who declare different religiosity levels, we took into consideration only our own measures of moral development *MDI*₁ and *MDI*₂. Future studies should take into consideration other measures of moral development like Kohlberg's Moral Development Interview, Rest's DIT and the Multidimensional Ethics Scale (MES) developed by Robin, Gordon, Jordan and Reidenbach, 1996.

People and groups of people continuously develop in any number of ways. Any growth or development implies movement from a lower state of existence to a higher, more preferred state of existence in line with the ideals and aspirations of a group of people (Mulla and Krishnan, 2014). These ideals are taken from a people's culture and represent their assumptions and beliefs about the nature of humankind, the nature of the world, and central goals of life. To better manage business, business leaders themselves must learn what it is to assimilate myriad cultural differences and values, including religion and religiosity, and how such differences affect moral development and moral decision-making.

References are available upon request from Marek Pawlak