



# Religious and Spiritual Needs in Employee Motivation: A Conceptual Framework for Organizational and Economic Behavior

Valery Vladimirovich Glushchenko\*

Russian State University of Social Technologies, Moscow, Russian Federation

\*Correspondence: E-mail: [glu-valery@yandex.ru](mailto:glu-valery@yandex.ru)

## ABSTRACT

Employee motivation is commonly explained through physiological, security, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs, while religious and spiritual needs receive considerably less attention in organizational motivation models. This conceptual study examines whether religious and spiritual needs can be incorporated into employee motivation theory and interpreted in relation to organizational and economic behavior. The study applies literature analysis, historical analysis, comparative theoretical analysis, and system analysis to examine motivation theory, existential needs, workplace spirituality, and religious needs. The analysis proposes that spiritual needs can be treated as higher-order needs that influence how employees interpret and satisfy other categories of needs. Religious needs are positioned as an important component of this higher-order level because they may shape values, meaning, moral orientation, interpersonal relations, and workplace decisions. The proposed framework extends conventional motivation models and provides a conceptual basis for understanding non-material factors in employee behavior and organizational management.

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article History:

Submitted/Received 05 Jan 2026

First Revised 28 Jul 2026

Accepted 18 Aug 2026

First Available online 20 Aug 2026

Publication Date 01 Sept 2026

### Keyword:

Employee motivation;  
Organizational behavior;  
Religious needs;  
Spiritual needs;  
Workplace spirituality.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Employee motivation is an important element of organizational management because employee behavior reflects both material and non-material needs. Human motivation has commonly been explained through a hierarchy of needs consisting of physiological needs, safety needs, social or belongingness needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization [1]. This framework provides a structured explanation of how different categories of needs may influence individual behavior and has become one of the most widely recognized approaches to understanding motivation in organizational settings. However, the conventional hierarchy does not explicitly position religious and spiritual needs as a distinct category of motivation. This creates a conceptual limitation because human behavior cannot always be explained only through material security, social belonging, recognition, and self-development. Individuals may also seek meaning, moral orientation, identity, connectedness, transcendence, and consistency between personal values and their activities.

Workplace spirituality provides an important basis for understanding these higher-order dimensions. Meaningful work, a sense of community, and alignment between personal and organizational values have been associated with employee work attitudes and organizational behavior [2]. Spiritual dimensions have also been linked with intrinsic motivation, meaning, membership, and performance-related outcomes, indicating that employee motivation may include factors beyond material incentives [3].

The relationship between spirituality and organizational commitment further supports the importance of higher-order non-material needs in the workplace. Employees who experience meaning, belonging, and value congruence may develop stronger attachment to their organizations [4]. Spirituality, meaning in life, work commitment, and motivation have also been found to be interrelated, reinforcing the view that employee behavior may be shaped by existential and value-based considerations [5].

Religious needs can be considered a more specific component within this broader spiritual dimension. Such needs may include religious faith, prayer and ritual, spiritual communication, moral guidance, and the formation of a religious worldview. These needs can influence how individuals interpret good and evil, personal responsibility, relationships with others, and the meaning of life. In this sense, religious needs may affect not only personal belief but also the ways in which other human needs are interpreted and satisfied.

Religious needs may also have direct implications in employment settings because they can interact with working conditions, employment agreements, organizational regulations, employee rights, and protection from discrimination [6]. Religion, values, needs, and social identity are also closely related in shaping individual and collective behavior [7].

The connection between spiritual traditions and work adds another important dimension. Spiritual traditions may influence how employees interpret meaningful work and how they reconcile personal meaning with social and normative expectations [8]. This suggests that spiritual and religious orientations can contribute to decisions concerning appropriate conduct, responsibility, interpersonal relations, occupational choices, and workplace behavior.

Despite these developments, an important conceptual gap remains. Conventional motivation theory provides a structured hierarchy of human needs but does not explicitly establish religious and spiritual needs as a distinct higher-order category [1]. Workplace

spirituality research demonstrates the organizational relevance of meaning, values, connectedness, commitment, and intrinsic motivation [2-5]. Research concerning religious needs also shows their relevance to employment conditions, social identity, and behavioral orientation [6-8]. However, these perspectives have not been sufficiently integrated into a single conceptual framework of employee motivation.

The present study addresses this gap by proposing that spiritual needs can be treated as a higher-order category of human needs, while religious needs can be positioned as an important component of this category. The novelty of this study lies in the proposition that spiritual and religious needs do not merely represent an additional level of motivation but may also influence how other needs are interpreted, prioritized, and satisfied. This develops the original idea that spiritual needs may have a system-forming role in human motivation.

Accordingly, this study aims to develop a conceptual framework for integrating religious and spiritual needs into employee motivation systems and to examine their implications for organizational and economic behavior. Specifically, this study addresses the following questions: (i) How can religious and spiritual needs be positioned within existing theories of human motivation? (ii) How may religious and spiritual needs influence other categories of employee needs? (iii) What are the organizational and managerial implications of incorporating religious and spiritual needs into employee motivation systems?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Human Needs and Higher-Order Motivation**

Human motivation is commonly explained through five categories of needs: physiological, safety, social or belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization [1]. In organizational settings, these categories may be associated with compensation, job security, workplace relationships, recognition, professional development, and opportunities for self-expression. However, conventional motivation models provide limited explicit consideration of religious and spiritual needs. This limitation is relevant because employees may also seek meaning, identity, moral orientation, connectedness, and consistency between personal values and work activities [2-5].

**Table 1** summarizes the relationship between conventional needs and the higher-order dimensions considered in this study. Workplace spirituality has been associated with meaningful work, community, value alignment, intrinsic motivation, and organizational commitment [2-5]. These findings suggest that higher-order non-material needs may influence workplace behavior in ways that cannot be fully explained through conventional material or social incentives.

### **2.2. Spiritual and Religious Needs**

Spiritual needs may include meaning, self-identification, personal development, worldview formation, moral orientation, love, and transcendence. These needs differ from basic needs because they are primarily concerned with the interpretation and direction of life rather than physical survival. Religious needs represent a more specific component of spiritual needs. They may include religious faith, prayer and ritual, spiritual communication, moral guidance, and the formation of a religious worldview. These needs may be expressed through religious practice, participation in religious communities, observance of religious norms, study of religious texts, and charitable activities. Religious and spiritual needs can also influence

workplace behavior. They may affect interpretations of responsibility, acceptable conduct, relationships, material aspirations, and the meaning of work. Religious needs may additionally interact with employment conditions, organizational policies, employee rights, and anti-discrimination considerations [6-8].

**Table 1.** Comparison of conventional and higher-order human needs.

| NEED CATEGORY           | MAIN ORIENTATION                                     | TYPICAL EXPRESSION                                                               | ORGANIZATIONAL | CONCEPTUAL LIMITATION                                    |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Physiological           | Basic survival                                       | Salary, rest, physical working conditions                                        |                | Primarily material                                       |
| Safety                  | Security and stability                               | Job security, protection, predictable conditions                                 |                | Limited attention to meaning and values                  |
| Social                  | Belonging and relationships                          | Team membership, social interaction                                              |                | Does not fully capture spiritual belonging               |
| Esteem                  | Recognition and status                               | Promotion, appreciation, professional recognition                                |                | Focuses mainly on social recognition                     |
| Self-actualization      | Personal development                                 | Creativity, achievement, self-expression                                         |                | Does not explicitly include religious or spiritual needs |
| Spiritual and religious | Meaning, worldview, moral orientation, transcendence | Meaningful work, value alignment, religious accommodation, moral decision-making |                | Proposed as a higher-order and system-forming category   |

### 2.3. Conceptual Position in Employee Motivation

The key conceptual issue is whether spiritual and religious needs should be treated only as another level of motivation or as factors that influence the interpretation and satisfaction of other needs. Spiritual needs may have a system-forming role because they can influence how individuals understand and satisfy physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs. This distinction is summarized in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Conceptual role of spiritual and religious needs in employee motivation.

| CONCEPTUAL ROLE              | DESCRIPTION                                                                    | ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATION                                                                  |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Additional higher-order need | Spiritual and religious needs are added above existing needs                   | Motivation systems should recognize non-material employee needs                             |
| Value-guiding need           | Spiritual and religious needs influence moral and behavioral orientation       | Values may affect workplace decisions and conduct                                           |
| Meaning-forming need         | Spiritual needs influence how employees interpret work and life                | Meaningful work may strengthen motivation and commitment                                    |
| System-forming need          | Spiritual needs influence how other needs are prioritized and satisfied        | Motivation systems should consider interactions among material, social, and spiritual needs |
| Managerial factor            | Religious and spiritual needs affect organizational relationships and policies | Organizations may need appropriate accommodation and non-discrimination mechanisms          |

Based on this framework, the present study examines spiritual needs as a higher-order category and religious needs as an important component of this category. The proposed

model therefore extends conventional motivation theory by introducing both an additional motivational level and a system-forming function.

### **3. METHODS**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This study used a conceptual and theoretical research design. No primary empirical data were collected. The analysis focused on human motivation, existential needs, spiritual needs, religious needs, workplace spirituality, and organizational behavior. The methodological basis consisted of literature analysis, historical analysis, comparative theoretical analysis, and system analysis.

#### **3.2. Literature and Theoretical Analysis**

The literature analysis examined three main areas: (i) conventional theories of human needs and employee motivation; (ii) workplace spirituality, meaningful work, organizational commitment, and higher-order motivation; and (iii) religious needs and their implications for individual and organizational behavior. The literature was used to identify concepts that overlap with conventional motivation theory and concepts that are not explicitly represented within the traditional hierarchy of needs.

#### **3.3. Comparative Analysis**

Comparative theoretical analysis was used to compare conventional human needs with existential, spiritual, and religious needs. The comparison focused on the following aspects:

- (i) the main orientation of each need;
- (ii) the way the need may be expressed in organizational settings;
- (iii) its relationship with employee behavior; and
- (iv) whether the need is already represented within the conventional hierarchy.

This analysis provided the basis for distinguishing spiritual and religious needs from physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs.

#### **3.4. System Analysis**

System analysis was used to examine relationships among the different categories of human needs. The conventional five-level hierarchy was used as the baseline structure [1]. Spiritual and religious needs were then examined to determine whether they function only as an additional higher-order category or whether they may also influence how other needs are interpreted, prioritized, and satisfied. This approach was particularly important because the proposed framework considers spiritual needs not only as an additional level but also as a possible system-forming factor in employee motivation.

#### **3.5. Conceptual Analysis Procedure**

The conceptual analysis was conducted in four stages, as summarized in **Table 3**. In short, the stages are as follows. The first stage established physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs as the baseline motivational structure [1]. The second stage identified higher-order dimensions related to meaning, identity, worldview, moral orientation, transcendence, faith, prayer and ritual, spiritual communication, and religious guidance. The third stage compared these higher-order dimensions with the conventional five-level hierarchy. The fourth stage examined whether spiritual and religious needs could influence

the interpretation and satisfaction of lower-order needs. The outcome of this procedure was an extended conceptual framework of employee motivation.

**Table 3.** Stages of the conceptual analysis.

| STAGE | ANALYTICAL ACTIVITY                                           | MAIN OUTPUT                              |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Identification of the conventional hierarchy of human needs   | Baseline five-level motivation structure |
| 2     | Identification of existential, spiritual, and religious needs | Higher-order need categories             |
| 3     | Comparison between conventional and higher-order needs        | Conceptual similarities and differences  |
| 4     | System analysis of interactions among need categories         | Proposed extended motivation framework   |

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Position of Spiritual and Religious Needs in the Motivation Hierarchy

The analysis indicates that spiritual and religious needs can be positioned above self-actualization as a higher-order category of human motivation. The conventional hierarchy explains physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs, while the proposed extension adds a sixth level related to meaning, worldview, moral orientation, transcendence, faith, and spiritual connection [1]. Religious needs are treated as a specific component of this higher-order category because they may include religious faith, prayer and ritual, spiritual communication, moral guidance, and the formation of a religious worldview. These dimensions extend beyond material survival and social recognition because they influence how individuals interpret life, work, relationships, and personal responsibility. The proposed hierarchy is summarized in **Table 4**. The sixth level does not imply that all employees have identical spiritual or religious needs. Instead, it provides a conceptual category for employees whose motivation is partly influenced by meaning, values, belief, and spiritual orientation.

**Table 4.** Extended hierarchy of employee needs.

| LEVEL | NEED CATEGORY           | MAIN ORIENTATION                          | ORGANIZATIONAL EXPRESSION                                                        |
|-------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Physiological           | Basic survival                            | Salary, rest, physical working conditions                                        |
| 2     | Safety                  | Security and stability                    | Job security, workplace protection                                               |
| 3     | Social                  | Belonging and relationships               | Teamwork, social inclusion                                                       |
| 4     | Esteem                  | Recognition and status                    | Appreciation, promotion, professional recognition                                |
| 5     | Self-actualization      | Personal development                      | Creativity, achievement, autonomy                                                |
| 6     | Spiritual and religious | Meaning, values, worldview, transcendence | Meaningful work, value alignment, religious accommodation, moral decision-making |

### 4.2. Spiritual Needs as System-Forming Factors

The main conceptual result is that spiritual needs may function not only as an additional level but also as system-forming factors. In this interpretation, spiritual and religious needs can influence how employees understand and satisfy the other five categories of needs. For example, values and beliefs may affect attitudes toward income, consumption, security,

workplace relationships, professional status, and self-development. Spiritual needs may therefore influence several motivational levels simultaneously rather than functioning independently at the top of the hierarchy. This relationship is summarized in **Table 5**. This system-forming role distinguishes the proposed framework from a simple six-level hierarchy. Spiritual and religious needs are therefore interpreted as both higher-order needs and guiding factors that may influence the satisfaction of other needs.

**Table 5.** System-forming influence of spiritual and religious needs.

| CONVENTIONAL NEED  | POSSIBLE INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUAL OR RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION                     |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Physiological      | Attitudes toward consumption, material sufficiency, and lifestyle            |
| Safety             | Interpretation of security, trust, uncertainty, and personal responsibility  |
| Social             | Community belonging, interpersonal relationships, and mutual support         |
| Esteem             | Meaning of recognition, status, humility, and social responsibility          |
| Self-actualization | Interpretation of achievement, purpose, creativity, and personal development |

### 4.3. Employee Motivation and Organizational Behavior

The proposed framework has direct implications for employee motivation. Workplace spirituality has been associated with meaningful work, value alignment, intrinsic motivation, organizational commitment, and employee attitudes [2-5]. This supports the view that non-material factors can contribute to how employees interpret their work and their relationship with an organization. Motivational systems are also related to employee productivity because they influence effort, work participation, and responses to organizational expectations. Different motivational approaches can affect job productivity in industrial organizations [9]. The present framework extends this perspective by suggesting that meaning, beliefs, moral orientation, and spiritual values may also contribute to work-related behavior. Religious and spiritual factors can therefore be relevant even when organizations do not explicitly use religious language. Their influence may appear through ethical expectations, interpretations of meaningful work, interpersonal conduct, commitment, and the ways employees respond to organizational goals.

### 4.4. Economic and Managerial Implications

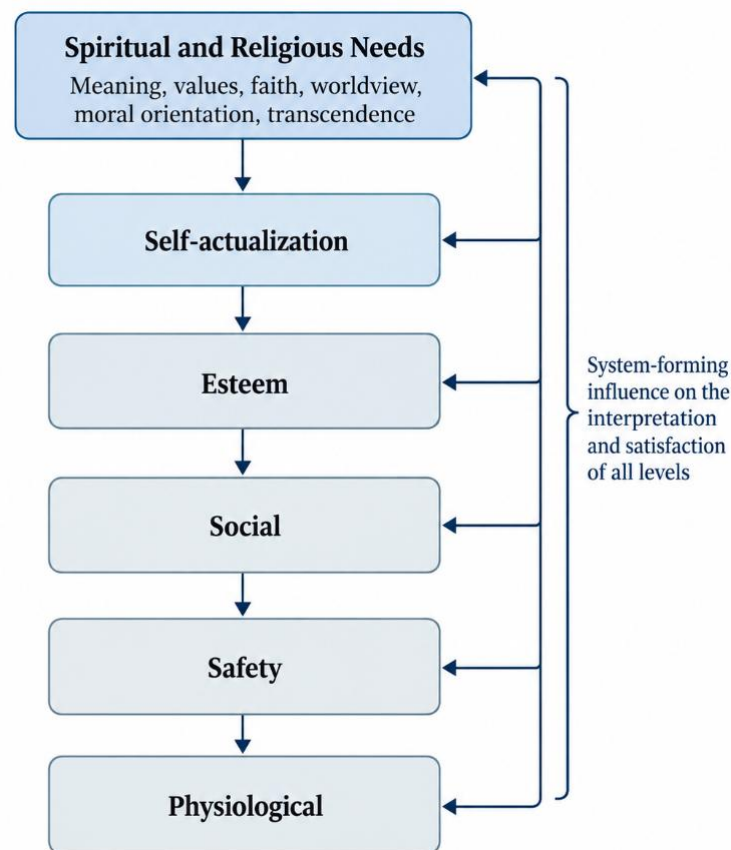
Religious and spiritual needs may also have economic and managerial implications because values and beliefs can influence individual and collective decision-making. Religious factors can contribute to the formation of economic behavior, social norms, and approaches to socioeconomic risk [10]. Religion can also function as a social mechanism that influences interpersonal relations, social coordination, and the reduction or escalation of social risks [11]. Religious institutions and belief systems may additionally have historical, institutional, and economic functions that affect social and organizational behavior [12]. The main managerial implications are summarized in **Table 6**. The proposed framework does not replace conventional motivation systems. Salary, job security, social relationships, recognition, and professional development remain important. Spiritual and religious needs provide an additional dimension for explaining why employees may respond differently to similar organizational conditions.

**Table 6.** Managerial implications of spiritual and religious needs.

| EMPLOYEE DIMENSION      | POSSIBLE ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE                      | EXPECTED IMPLICATION                 |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Meaning and purpose     | Connect tasks with organizational purpose             | Stronger intrinsic motivation        |
| Religious practice      | Provide reasonable accommodation                      | Greater inclusion                    |
| Personal values         | Maintain ethical and transparent practices            | Better value alignment               |
| Spiritual belonging     | Support respectful workplace interaction              | Improved interpersonal relations     |
| Moral orientation       | Establish clear ethical standards                     | More consistent conduct              |
| Religious diversity     | Apply non-discrimination and equal-treatment policies | Reduced workplace conflict           |
| Higher-order motivation | Combine material and non-material motivation          | More comprehensive motivation system |

#### 4.5. Integrated Conceptual Framework

The results support two connected propositions. First, spiritual and religious needs can be positioned as a sixth, higher-order category above self-actualization. Second, these needs may also have a system-forming function because they can influence how lower-order needs are interpreted and satisfied. This conceptual relationship is illustrated in **Figure 1**. The framework therefore combines a hierarchical interpretation with a system perspective. It connects conventional employee needs with higher-order spiritual dimensions and provides a conceptual basis for understanding how values, beliefs, meaning, and moral orientation may influence organizational and economic behavior [2-5, 9-12].

**Figure 1.** Proposed extended employee motivation framework.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study developed a conceptual framework that extends conventional employee motivation theory by positioning spiritual and religious needs as a higher-order category of human needs. The proposed framework suggests that these needs are not only additional motivational factors but may also influence how physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs are interpreted and satisfied. Religious needs were identified as an important component of spiritual needs because they may shape meaning, worldview, moral orientation, interpersonal relationships, and workplace decisions. From an organizational perspective, these dimensions may influence motivation, commitment, ethical behavior, inclusion, and responses to organizational policies. The framework therefore combines a hierarchical and system-forming interpretation of employee motivation. Organizations may benefit from considering both material and non-material dimensions when developing motivation systems, particularly in religiously and culturally diverse workplaces. Because this study is conceptual and does not use primary empirical data, the proposed framework requires further testing. Future research should examine the relationships among spiritual needs, religious needs, employee motivation, organizational commitment, productivity, and economic behavior using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approaches.

## 6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The author confirmed that the paper is free from plagiarism.

## 7. REFERENCES

- [1] Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396.
- [2] Milliman, J., Czaplewski, A. J., and Ferguson, J. (2003). Workplace spirituality and employee work attitudes: An exploratory empirical assessment. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 16(4), 426-447.
- [3] Fry, L. W. (2003). Toward a theory of spiritual leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14(6), 693-727.
- [4] Rego, A., and Pina e Cunha, M. (2008). Workplace spirituality and organizational commitment: An empirical study. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 21(1), 53-75.
- [5] De Klerk, J. J., Boshoff, A. B., and Van Wyk, R. (2006). Spirituality in practice: Relationships between meaning in life, commitment and motivation. *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion*, 3(4), 319-347.
- [6] Cash, K. C., and Gray, G. R. (2000). A framework for accommodating religion and spirituality in the workplace. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 14(3), 124-133.
- [7] Pronina, T. S., Fedotov, Yu. S., and Fedotova, E. Y. (2018). Typologization of new religious movements based on values and needs. *Sociological Research*, 1(1), 73-82.
- [8] Vu, M. C., and Burton, N. (2022). The influence of spiritual traditions on the interplay of subjective and normative interpretations of meaningful work. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 180, 543-566.
- [9] Shittu, A., and Lasisi, A. K. (2023). Influence of motivational style in enhancing job productivity in industrial organizations. *ASEAN Journal of Economic and Economic Education*, 2(2), 139-144.
- [10] Vladimirovich, G. V. (2026). Analyzing how religions shape economic development

models: A religiology-based framework for managing socioeconomic risks. *ASEAN Journal of Economic and Economic Education*, 5(1), 7-12.

- [11] Glushchenko, V. V. (2026). Religion as social technology: A conceptual framework for reducing social risks in multireligious societies. *ASEAN Journal of Religion, Education, and Society*, 5(1), 43-50.
- [12] Vladimirovich, G. V. (2026). Religiology as a meta-theory: Historical, institutional, and economic functions of religion. *ASEAN Journal of Religion, Education, and Society*, 5(2), 51-60.