# The Impact of Religion and Non-Monetary Incentives on Employee Behavior in Iraqi Universities

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Abstract
This study investigates the role of religion and non-monetary incentives on employee behavior and performance regarding academic staff in Iraqi universities. This study examines the mediating roles of intrinsic motivation, organizational commitment and meaningful work in the relationship between independent variable and dependent variable. A quantitative research design was used, with data collected from a total of 248 academic staff in public and private universities around Iraq. To obtain enough valid questionnaires and to control data quality, both face-to-face and online survey methods were performed. Smart PLS software was used to analyze the proposed conceptual framework through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). In conclusion, it is anticipated show that the results will positively affect religion and non-financial incentives have a beneficial impact on employee behavior and organizational performance with or without mediation of intrinsic motivation, organizational commitment, and meaningful work. This study provides empirical evidence for the organizational behavior and higher education literature in Iraq, which is situated in a context where religious values and non-monetary motivators are prevalent. Therefore, the findings will help university administrators to provide effective practices that provide motivation and organization performance through non-monetary management practices by value-based approaches.

Keywords: Religion, Non-Monetary Incentives, Intrinsic Motivation, Organizational Commitment, Meaningful Work, Employee Behavior, Organizational Performance.

## Introduction

Higher education contributes to the development of human capital, innovation and national development, thus performs vital role in a community. Academic staff are the foundation of the teaching, research and community engagement activities of universities thus their performance and behavior play a significant role in the success or failure of universities. Over the years, universities have faced mounting pressures around employee motivation, commitment and performance especially in developing countries where higher education institutions contend with funding shortages, organizational reforms and changing societal commitments (Maama, 2024). The difficulty of these challenges is most apparent in Iraq, where there can be economic and administrative pressures as universities seek to improve the quality of education and institutional effectiveness. As a result, the factors that affect employee behavior and organizational performance have become an active area of research. In Iraqi society, religion continue to be an important part of social and cultural life and influences individuals' attitudes, values, beliefs, behaviors in the workplace opportunities, organizational support and meaningful work are particularly effective levers for improving employee motivation and making them feel engaged in their work. However Religious beliefs generally promote ethical behavior, responsibility, honor and dedication which could potentially translate into desirable employee work outcomes (Raza et al., 2025). At the same time, organizations are increasingly acknowledging that non-monetary incentives recognition, autonomy, professional development er, when the financial reward is not available in higher education institutions non-monetary rewards can be beneficial alternatives for positive employee attitudes and behaviors. Research has established intrinsic motivation, organizational commitment, and meaningful work as significant psychological mechanisms that impact workplace variables. Intrinsic Motivation an employee's internal desire to personally appear for work to achieve personal satisfaction and achievement as well as organizational commitment refer to the emotional attachment/loyalty of an employee toward the institution, whereas meaningful work refers to whether one believes that their actions are meaningful. All these factors relate to better performance, increased engagement, higher commitment, and more successful organizations. But although the literature on organizational behavior and employee motivation is growing, there has been little attention paid to research that simultaneously examines the roles of religion and non-monetary incentives in shaping employee behavior and organizational performance by mediating factors (intrinsic motivation, organizational commitment, meaningful work), particularly in Iraqi universities. In addition, most of the studies in Iraq have confined themselves to leadership, job satisfaction and traditional human resource management but there is a big gap concerning how much cultural and motivational factors will shape back onto workplace outcomes (Steers&Sánchez-Runde, 2017). It indicates the need for a more extensive investigation that describes how the role of religion and non-monetary or psychological incentives impacts employee behavior and performance in factors like Organizational performance, academic staff, Iraqi higher education institutions, Employee motivation. To fill this critical gap in literature, the present study develops a conceptual framework that uniquely integrates religion and non-monetary incentives as antecedents, with intrinsic motivation, organizational commitment, and meaningful work as mediating variables, to predict employee behavior and organizational performance, an empirical examination that has not been undertaken in the context of Iraqi higher education. This study uses quantitative research to observe the relationship of these constructs directly or indirectly. Two hundred forty-eight academic staff working in Iraqi universities will be asked to participate to respond either face-to-face or online the questioners, and analysis of hypothesized relationships will be conducted using Smart PLS software. It fills a gap in the literature by combining cultural and organizational perspectives within a single framework, and by providing empirical data from the under-researched context of Iraqi higher education (Hamad, 2018). This research is different from the existing literature by examining the following independent variables religion and non-monetary incentives have not yet been analyzed simultaneously while controlling three mediating mechanisms to explain employee outcomes. This study will have a theoretical impact by extending research on organization behavior and motivation literature through cultural, psychological and organizational influences. It will also make a practical contribution by providing university administrators and policymakers with evidence-based recommendations on how to improve employee behavior and organizational performance through value-based and non-financial forms of motivational strategies. In the end, these findings might help Iraqi universities to adopt better human resource practices that keep employees motivated and committed in addition to providing meaningful work experiences, leading to positive employee behavior which improves organizational performance.

## 2.Letreture Review

### 2.1 Religion

Religion is an important factor influencing employee commitment and workplace behavior. Religion is especially significant in countries where religious values frequently affect daily life. Ethics is what religion can teach Leadership training nowadays focuses on ethical values, self-discipline, fairness toward others and the like (e.g., truthfulness, honesty, integrity) (Fry, 2003). New studies highlight that higher employee motivation, job performance and workplace engagement are driven by religiosity and Islamic work ethics. Work-meaning significantly enhances workers' positive attitudes and behaviors towards their organizations if they believe that their work is an expression of their religious values. Around the world, religion plays a significant role as one of the sociocultural factors that could impact an academic staff's commitment and motivation (Goncharuk et al., 2025) especially at Iraqi universities and religious beliefs incentivize employees to consider work not merely as a means of livelihood but rather an obligation with meaning and morality. Consequently, they do their work for the intrinsic value it adds to their lives. Prior research has also suggested that religious values augment internal motivation by fostering purpose, responsibility and self-determination among employees.
Based on the preceding discussion, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H1: Religion has a positive and significant effect on employees' intrinsic motivation.*

*H2: Religion has a positive and significant effect on employees' organizational commitment.*

### 2.2 Non-Monetary Incentives

Non-Monetary Incentives and Non-Money based tokens given to employees as an award from the organization which gives momentum in performance. They range from recognition, career development opportunities, autonomy and empowerment to appreciation, training and organizational support. Monetary rewards are associated more with their physical needs being fulfilled, while non-monetary incentives fulfil an employee's psychological and social needs; hence they feel happier on the job resulting in greater job satisfaction and engagement. And recent research shows that, for knowledge-based organizations such as universities, employees look to both recognition and opportunities for professional growth just as much as compensation. Non-monetary incentives are therefore indispensable to promoting the work-related attitudes and behaviors of academic staff (Altassan, 2024; Danish&Usman, 2010) particularly if financial resources are limited as is often the case for Iraqi higher education establishments. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H3: Non-monetary incentives have a positive and significant effect on employees' organizational commitment.*

*H4: Non-monetary incentives have a positive and significant effect on employees' meaningful work.*

### 2.3 Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is working for your own sake, doing something because you find it interesting or enjoy the challenge. The Self-Determination Theory states that intrinsically motivated employees will perform their jobs because they find value and satisfaction in the work itself, instead of performing to attain something external. Hopefully, research reported often from The Science of Motivation has proven that intrinsic motivation enhances employee engagement, creativity and persistence with task completion, and job performance. Moreover, intrinsic motivation enhances the likelihood that employees will contribute substantively to organizational goals and be proactive (Breevaart&Bakker, 2018). Intrinsic motivation is possible to gain by studying it, then discussing it in a different way than the practical and behavioral situation towards some professionals, within Iraqi universities because these academics often work in teaching and research for personal interest, professional achievement and social contribution (Alnajem&Al-sudani, 2024; Ensour et al., 2025). In accordance with prior research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H5: Intrinsic motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee behavior.*

### 2.4 Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is an abstract reflection of the devotion and allegiance that employees experience or sense toward their organization (Younus&Zaidan, 2022). An employee with strong organizational commitment is more likely to identify with the goals of their organization and devote their loyalty to their institution while putting forth greater effort on the job. Studies have suggested high performing organizations will see more organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) rate, low turnover intentions and better performance among committed employees (Urban et al., 2023). As an educational institution, organizational commitment is crucial as it helps to promote institutional stability, quality of education and effectiveness." Strengthening organizational commitment in Iraqi universities as organizations faced with retirements, sustainable engagement and human resource performance (Aboramadan et al., 2021). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H6: Organizational commitment has a positive and significant effect on employee behavior.*

### 2.5 Meaningful Work

Meaningful work is a perception that one's own work has meaning or purpose and value. If they see their work in terms of having purpose and meaning, then they are more likely to become satisfied, engaged and above all psychologically flourished from such employment. Studies show that meaningful work positively affects the motivation, commitment, performance and overarching behavior of employees in the workplace (Martela et al., 2021). However, the concept of meaningful work is not particularly new to higher education; academic staff have long perceived their teaching, research and community service as activities leading to development in society and knowledge production. As such, employees who find their jobs to be meaningful are more likely to exhibit positive behaviors that benefit both the individual and the organization (Allen&Kilmann, 2001). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H7: Meaningful work has a positive and significant effect on employee behavior.*

### 2.6 Employee Behavior

Employee behavior is the way that employees behave towards others and the way they conduct themselves at work. Positive Employee Behavior: Cooperation, Responsibility, Engagement, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Ethical Conduct and Committed to Organizational Objectives. These behaviors are influenced by psychological and organizational factors including motivation, commitment, workplace support, and meaning of work (Bakker et al., 2023). Positive employee behavior plays a critical role in ensuring that an organization becomes effective, as it is influenced by factors such as enhanced productivity and teamwork, quality of service, and improved workplace relationships. Employee behavior, in higher education settings such as Iraqi universities, is a key organizational outcome that can shape educational quality, all facets of student outcomes and institutional reputation (Kim&Beehr, 2022). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H8: Employee behavior has a positive and significant effect on organizational performance.*

### 2.7 Organizational Performance

Organizational performance describes how well an institution is managed and how it meets its goals. Institutional performance in relation to universities can be reflected in teaching quality, research productivity, employee effectiveness, student satisfaction and institutional success (Zaidan et al., 2025). In recent years, research has shown how things like employee motivation, commitment, engagement and workplace culture are major influencers of organizational performance (Ali et al., 2023). Motivated, committed and who feel that a job is meaningful tend to perform better and contribute positively towards organizational objectives. Enhancing organizational performance is a necessity for improving competitiveness, educational quality, and long-term sustainability of Iraqi universities within an increasingly demanding higher education environment (Makarova et al., 2025). Issa (2026) defines organizational agility as the organization's ability to respond swiftly and effectively to environmental changes, opportunities, and challenges, making it critical for performance enhancement and competitive advantage, particularly in dynamic context. His study on Iraqi SMEs found that top management support, digital capabilities, and government support significantly and positively affect organizational agility, which in turn enhances organizational performance. The study also confirmed that organizational agility partially mediates the relationship between digital transformation drives and firm performance.

## 2.8 Conceptual Framework

This study is based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in the performance domain, which suggests that people will experience higher levels of motivation, commitment and performance when their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are fulfilled (Lejeune&Burnay, 2026). From this theoretical perspective, Religion and Non-Monetary Incentives are suggested to be the independent variables that send effect about workplace inclination of academic staff in Iraqi universities (Zaidan, 2025). It is theorized that religion will influence employees' values, ethical behavior and sense of purpose and non-monetary incentives (recognition, autonomy, continued professional development, organizational support) would positively impact employee satisfaction and engagement (Clauss et al., 2021). This framework also suggests that these effects happen through three mediating mechanisms; Intrinsic Motivation, Organizational Commitment and Meaningful Work. Internal Motivated Employees, committed to their institutions and recognizing significance in their work tend to display a positive Employee Behavior which reflects on Organization Performance. Thus, the conceptual framework posits that religion, and non-pecuniary incentives affect employee behavior and organizational performance directly and indirectly via intrinsic motivation, organizational commitment, and meaningful work to derive an overall explanation for workplace outcomes in higher education institutions in Iraq. The proposed relationships among the study variables are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

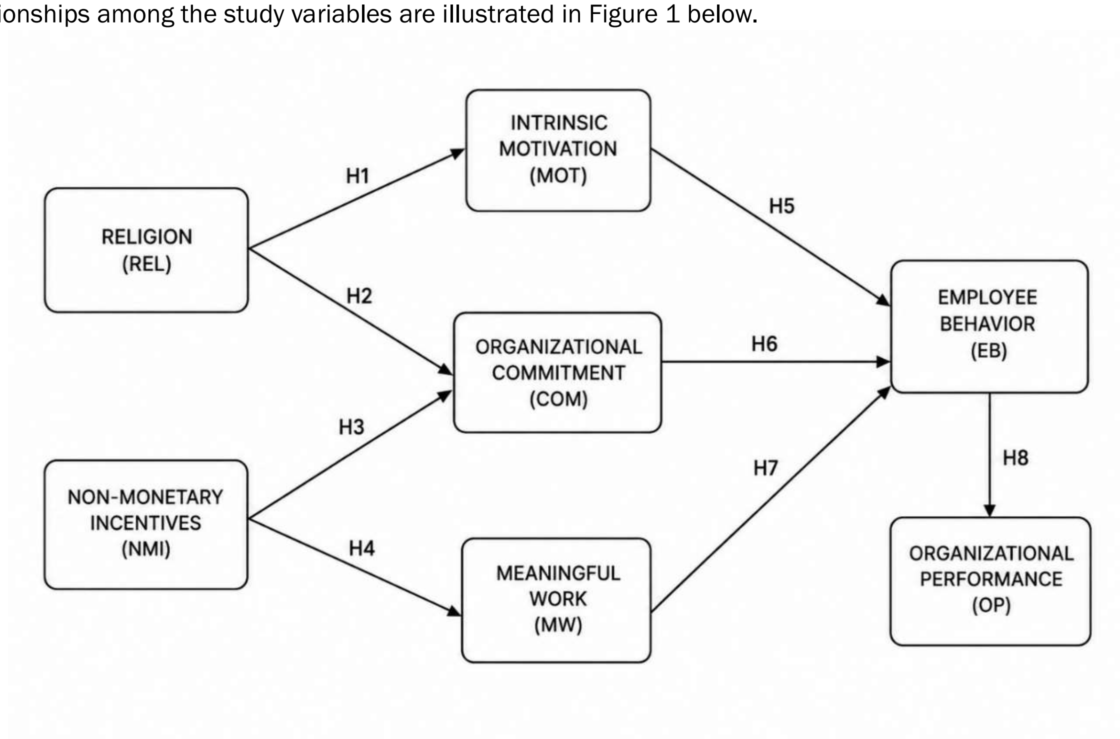


**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1 Research Design

Abstract This study employs a quantitative research approach to examine the impact of religion and non-monetary incentives on employee behavior and organizational performance in academic staff working at Iraqi universities. This research is quantitative because the relationships between many variables can be investigated and hypotheses tested using statistical methods. It uses a cross-sectional survey design; data is collected from respondents at one point in time.

## 3.2 Population Sample and Sampling Technique

The research population for this study was academic and administrative workers working in selected public and private universities of Iraq. The sample covered 5 universities to capture the gender representation across diverse higher education institutions, including both private and public higher education. Out of 270 questionnaires that were distributed to employees at the selected universities, a total of 248 valid responses (99.2% response rate) were received and used in the final analysis. Two questionnaires were dropped after the data screening and cleaning since they contained missing answers, leaving us with a sample of 248 participants. Convenience sampling was used and staff members working at an institution of higher education were invited to fill in the survey if they agreed to participate. The chosen universities spanned regions and ownership, which improved the generalizability of the results within the Iraqi higher education context and improved sampling diversity. The list of selected universities and the number of distributed questionnaires is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Public and Private Universities

| No. | University | Type | Website | Distributed Questionnaires |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Cihan University-Erbil | Private | https://cihanuniversity.edu.iq | 60 |
| 2 | University of Baghdad | Public | https://uobaghdad.edu.iq | 60 |
| 3 | University of Mosul | Public | https://uomosul.edu.iq | 50 |
| 4 | University of Basrah | Public | https://www.uobasrah.edu.iq | 50 |
| 5 | Lebanese French University (LFU), Erbil | Private | https://lfu.edu.krd | 50 |
| Total | | | | 270 |

In-person as well as online data was collected. An electronic version of the questionnaire was generated through Google Forms and disseminated via university email systems, academic and administrative communication groups within universities, and social media platforms widely utilized by university personnel. Additionally, study questionnaires were hand delivered to employees in colleges, departments, administrative offices and other campus facilities. This combined use of online and face-to-face distribution decreased accessibility barriers, optimized response rates, and guaranteed that informants with limited technology experience could still partake in the survey.

A pilot study was done with 20 Cihan University-Erbil employees, academic and administrative staff members around the main survey. Pilot scorings were analyzed in SPSS to ascertain the clarity, reliability and relevancy of questionnaire items. The findings showed satisfactory reliability levels for each scale, proxy as Cronbach's Alpha was over the cut-off point of 0.70 across scales. Participants found that questionnaire items were clear, comprehensible, and aligned to study objectives. Thus, no extensive changes were needed, and the questionnaire was deemed suitable for data collection on a larger scale.

To ensure content validity of the questionnaire, three more senior professors in organizational behavior, human resource management and higher education management validated contents of the instrument. Experts rated the tool for item relevance, clarity of wording, measurement appropriateness and questionnaire structure. According to their suggestions, some minor language and formatting changes were included in the instrument. After these revisions the experts acknowledged that constructs were appropriately captured and declared them appropriate for administration in the main study.

### 3.3 Measurement of Variables

The questionnaire was composed of two parts. The first part includes the collection of demographic data, gender, age, educational qualification, academic rank and experience years. The second part of the study makes use of already validated scales from literature. The independent variables are Religion (REL) and Non-Monetary Incentives (NMI). MOT, COM and MW are mediating variables (Hamad, 2018; Maama, 2024; Raza et al., 2025; Steers&Sánchez-Runde, 2017). Note that the dependent variables are Employee Behavior (EB) and Organizational Performance (OP). All the items were rated using 5-point Likert scales from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

### 3.4 Ethical Considerations

Very careful ethical consideration is given to all aspects of the research. This study is voluntary, and respondents are made fully aware of the objective of this research prior to filling out the questionnaire. Confidentiality and anonymity are maintained, and no information that identifies individuals are released· The data is solely used for academic research purposes and kept in a password secured electronic storage system to uphold the privacy of participants.

## 4. Result

### 4.1 Demographic Questions

The demographic profile of the respondents is summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

| Variable | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 156 | 62.9 |
| | Female | 92 | 37.1 |
| Age | 20–29 years | 58 | 23.4 |
| | 30–39 years | 97 | 39.1 |
| | 40–49 years | 63 | 25.4 |
| | 50 years and above | 30 | 12.1 |
| Educational Qualification | Bachelor's Degree | 54 | 21.8 |
| | Master's Degree | 102 | 41.1 |
| | PhD | 80 | 32.3 |
| | Other | 12 | 4.8 |
| Job Position | Manager | 28 | 11.3 |
| | Researcher | 91 | 36.7 |
| | Laboratory Specialist | 76 | 30.6 |
| | Technical Staff | 34 | 13.7 |
| | Administrative Staff | 19 | 7.7 |
| Years of Experience | Less than 5 years | 49 | 19.8 |
| | 5–10 years | 87 | 35.1 |
| | 11–15 years | 66 | 26.6 |
| | More than 15 years | 46 | 18.5 |

### 4.2 Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Factor Loadings

**Table 3.** Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Factor Loadings

| Construct | Item | Loading | Cronbach's Alpha | rho_A | Composite Reliability (CR) | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Religion (REL) | REL1 | 0.864 | 0.919 | 0.920 | 0.939 | 0.755 |
| | REL2 | 0.864 | | | | |
| | REL3 | 0.852 | | | | |
| | REL4 | 0.879 | | | | |
| | REL5 | 0.884 | | | | |
| Non-Monetary Incentives (NMI) | NMI1 | 0.871 | 0.878 | 0.893 | 0.914 | 0.683 |
| | NMI2 | 0.815 | | | | |
| | NMI3 | 0.606 | | | | |
| | NMI4 | 0.894 | | | | |
| | NMI5 | 0.910 | | | | |
| Intrinsic Motivation (MOT) | MOT1 | 0.869 | 0.889 | 0.895 | 0.923 | 0.750 |
| | MOT2 | 0.881 | | | | |
| | MOT3 | 0.895 | | | | |
| | MOT4 | 0.817 | | | | |
| Organizational Commitment (COM) | COM1 | 0.785 | 0.817 | 0.847 | 0.872 | 0.581 |
| | COM3 | 0.646 | | | | |
| | COM4 | 0.614 | | | | |
| | COM5 | 0.859 | | | | |
| | COM6 | 0.870 | | | | |

| Construct | Item | Loading | Cronbach's Alpha | rho_A | Composite Reliability (CR) | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Meaningful Work (MW) | MW1 | 0.820 | 0.917 | 0.919 | 0.942 | 0.802 |
| | MW2 | 0.908 | | | | |
| | MW3 | 0.939 | | | | |
| | MW4 | 0.910 | | | | |
| Employee Behavior (EB) | EB1 | 0.826 | 0.873 | 0.881 | 0.909 | 0.666 |
| | EB2 | 0.844 | | | | |
| | EB3 | 0.871 | | | | |
| | EB4 | 0.832 | | | | |
| | EB5 | 0.698 | | | | |
| Organizational Performance (OP) | OP1 | 0.856 | 0.887 | 0.890 | 0.922 | 0.746 |
| | OP2 | 0.862 | | | | |
| | OP3 | 0.885 | | | | |
| | OP4 | 0.852 | | | | |

The results from the evaluation of reliability and convergent validity are shown for all constructs. According to Hair et al. (2019), factor loadings must be higher than 0.708, with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) greater than 0.70; Average Variance Extracted (AVE), only is acceptable if it is above the threshold of 0.50 to ensure that adequate reliability has been established along with convergent validity. The results indicate that the constructs all met these threshold guidelines. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.817 to 0.919 indicating a satisfactory level of internal consistency reliability and Composite Reliability (CR) ranged from 0.872 to 0.942 indicating good construct reliability (Table 3). Additionally, AVE values ranged between 0.581 and 0.802 of which exceeded the recommended cut-off 0.50 which denotes each construct explaining a significant amount of variance in its indicators this supports convergent validity (Fornell&Larcker, 1981). Although most of the indicator loadings were higher than the recommended level (>0.708), not all items met this threshold, particularly COM3 (0.646), COM4 (0.614), NMI3 (0.606) and EB5 (0.698). The purpose is to show that an indicator could be kept when it shows a loading between 0.40 and 0.70 if its elimination does not improve Composite Reliability or AVE, and the construct retains adequate reliability and validity (2021). All constructs also had acceptable CR values (above 0.70) and AVE values (above 0.50) in this study after including these indicators. Thus, the retention of these was deemed statistically and theoretically sound. Finally, to enhance reliability and convergent validity, we deleted from the measurement model any indicators with loadings below 0.40 identified in the preliminary evaluation as they contribute inadequately to the measurement of their corresponding constructs. This resulted in a better psychometric quality of the measurement model, maintaining theoretical integrity of the constructs.

### 4.3 Assessment of the Structural Model

Table 4. Coefficient of Determination $R^2$, Predictive Relevance $Q^2$, and Effect Size $f^2$

| Endogenous Construct | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ | $Q^2$ | $f^2$ | Effect Size |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee Behavior | 0.391 | 0.384 | 0.256 | 0.293 | Medium |
| Intrinsic Motivation | 0.236 | 0.233 | 0.173 | 0.160 | Medium |
| Meaningful Work | 0.395 | 0.392 | 0.313 | 0.188 | Medium |
| Organizational Commitment | 0.606 | 0.603 | 0.341 | 0.214 | Medium |
| Organizational Performance | 0.226 | 0.223 | 0.166 | 0.158 | Medium |
| Non-Monetary Incentives | — | — | — | 0.652 | Large |
| Religion | — | — | — | 0.309 | Medium |

| Endogenous Construct | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ | $Q^2$ | $f^2$ | Effect Size |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Religion (second effect) | — | — | — | 0.186 | Medium |

Note. $R^2$ = coefficient of determination; Adjusted $R^2$ = adjusted coefficient of determination; $Q^2$ = Stone–Geisser predictive relevance; $f^2$ = effect size. Following Hair et al. (2019), 0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, and 0.35 = large effect sizes. Positive $Q^2$ values indicate predictive relevance of the endogenous constructs.

Values of the endogenous constructs in the structural model and interprets $R^2$ values of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 as large, medium and small effect sizes respectively. The coefficient of determination ($R^2$), predictive relevance ($Q^2$), and effect size ($f^2$) for the endogenous constructs are reported in Table 4.

The results show that Organizational Commitment had the highest level of variance explained at $R^2 = 0.606$ (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.603$) with respect to Religion and Non-Monetary Incentives, meaning they jointly explained a lot of the variability in Organizational Commitment - 60.6%, which is both substantial (Hair et al., 2019). This implies that 39.5% of the variance in Meaningful Work was accounted for by Non-Monetary Incentives, demonstrating a moderate level of explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.395$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.392$). Likewise, Employee Behavior yielded an $R^2$ of 0.391 (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.384$) establishing that Intrinsic Motivation, Organizational Commitment and Meaningful Work jointly explained a moderate proportion (39.1%) of the variance in Employee Behavior. $R^2 = 0.236$ (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.233$), suggesting that Religion explained 23.6% of the variance in Intrinsic Motivation, indicating a modest level of explanatory power93 At last, Organizational Performance reflected an $R^2$ of 0.226 (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.223$); this means 22.6% of the variance in Organizational Performance was explained by Employee Behavior In conclusion, the results illustrate that the research model has acceptable predictive power as a whole and that the endogenous constructs have weak to high explanatory power following guidelines and the hypotheses, that all endogenous constructs have positive $Q^2$ values (0.166–0.341; Table 3), implying sufficient predictive relevance of the structural model. According to Hair et al. (2019), $Q^2$ values greater than 0, indicating that the model has predictive power for the endogenous constructs. In addition, the $f^2$ results indicate that the impact of these predictor constructs is significant in size. As a result, the effect sizes for these constructs (0.158–0.309) are between medium and large according to Cohen's rules of thumb suggesting that they contribute greatly to the explanation of the endogenous variables. Method according to Hair et al. (2019), if we compare it with the results, its prediction ability is sufficed although practical significance is modest.

### 4.4 Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

The discriminant validity of the measurement model was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait criterion, as presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Assessment of Discriminant Validity

| Construct | EB | MOT | MW | NMI | COM | OP | REL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee Behavior (EB) | — | | | | | | |
| Intrinsic Motivation (MOT) | 0.644 | — | | | | | |
| Meaningful Work (MW) | 0.470 | 0.571 | — | | | | |
| Non-Monetary Incentives (NMI) | 0.438 | 0.592 | 0.700 | — | | | |
| Organizational Commitment (COM) | 0.627 | 0.653 | 0.745 | 0.882 | — | | |
| Organizational Performance (OP) | 0.533 | 0.611 | 0.592 | 0.602 | 0.637 | — | |
| Religion (REL) | 0.460 | 0.535 | 0.696 | 0.847 | 0.823 | 0.589 | — |

Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) results applied for evaluating discriminant validity among the research constructs. the values below 0.90 establish discriminant validity. The results showed that all HTMT values were in a range of 0.438 to 0.882, which is lower than the cut-off value of 0.90 (Table 5). Legend Non-Monetary Incentives&Organizational Commitment (HTMT = 0.882) Religion&Non-Monetary Incentives (HTMT = 0.847), and Religion&Organizational Commitment (HTMT = 0.823). All values remained within the acceptable range recommended by Henseler et al. (2015) regardless of these relatively strong relationships. Thus, the results attest that these constructs are statistically separable and assess different conceptual domains. Thus, discriminant validity was achieved successfully confirming that the measurement model is adequate for analysis of structural model in later stage.

### 4.5 PLSpredict Assessment

The predictive performance of the model was evaluated using PLSpredict, with the results summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. PLSpredict Assessment

| Construct | $Q^2$ predict | RMSE Comparison | Predictive Ability |
|---|---|---|---|
| Employee Behavior | Positive | Most indicators: PLS<LM | Medium–High |
| Intrinsic Motivation | Positive | All indicators: PLS<LM | High |
| Meaningful Work | Positive | All indicators: PLS<LM | High |
| Organizational Commitment | Positive | All indicators: PLS<LM | High |
| Organizational Performance | Positive | Most indicators: PLS<LM | Medium–High |

The PLSpredict results support the assertion that this model exhibits acceptable predictive out-of-sample performance. $Q^2$predict used for the endogenous constructs were all positive, indicating prediction relevance. In addition, the PLS model produced lower predictions errors (RMSEs) than LM for all or most of indicators in each of the constructs which shows that the model outperforms any benchmark linear model in predicting new observations. In general, Intrinsic Motivation, Meaningful Work and Organizational Commitment showed strong predictive power while Employee Behavior and Organizational Performance had medium-to-high predicting ability. Supporting these findings, the predictive capability of the model is deemed adequate and consistent with PLSpredict evaluation guidelines suggested by Shmueli et al. (2019).

### 4.5 Structural Model

Structural model includes path coefficients, coefficient of determination ($R^2$) and model fit of the relationships between constructs are considered as the evaluation benchmark for structural models. The results show a significant positive direct relationship between Religion to Intrinsic Motivation ($\beta$ = 0.486) and Organizational Commitment ($\beta$ = 0.311), Non-Monetary Incentives → Organizational Commitment (0.494), and → Meaningful Work with $\beta$=0,628. Moreover, Intrinsic Motivation ($\beta$ = 0.390), Organizational Commitment ($\beta$ = 0.295), and Meaningful Work ($\beta$ = 0.027)) have a positive impact on Employee Behavior, while Employee Behavior positively impacts Organizational Performance ($\beta$ = 0.476). While Religion explains 23.6% of the variance in Intrinsic Motivation ($R^2$ = 0.236), Religion and Non-Monetary Incentives together explain 60.6% of Organizational Commitment ($R^2$ = 0.606). Moreover, Non-Monetary Incentives account for 39.5% of the variance in Meaningful Work ($R^2$ = 0.395). Intrinsic Motivation, Organizational Commitment and Meaningful Work explain 39.1% of the variance in Employee Behavior ($R^2$ = 0.391) and Employee Behavior explains 22.6% of the variance in Organizational Performance ($R^2$ = 0.226). The data were examined according to the recommendations of (Hair et al., 2019). The model exhibits moderate analytical legs, with the endogenous constructs showing weak to moderate predictive accuracy (Sarstedt et al., 2021), and Organizational Commitment demonstrates substantial explanatory power. More importantly, the structural model lends empirical support to the theoretical relationships suggested above while also confirming all three antecedents of employee behavior and organizational performance across religion non-financial incentives and psychological mechanisms. The results of the structural model, including path coefficients and explained variances, are presented in Figure 2.

### 4.6 Measurement Model

The results of the measurement model assessment via PLS-SEM are given in figure 3, that internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. The indicator loadings, presented in the model, indicate that most of the measurement items outperformed the recommended threshold (greater than 0.708), thus indicating satisfactory indicator reliability. While a few indicators had loadings just below the preferred threshold, including COM3 (0.646), COM4 (0.614), NMI3 (0.606), and EB5 (0.698), Hair et al (2024) may propose that indicators with loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 can be kept in the model when removing an indicator does not meaningfully increase Composite Reliability (CR) or Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

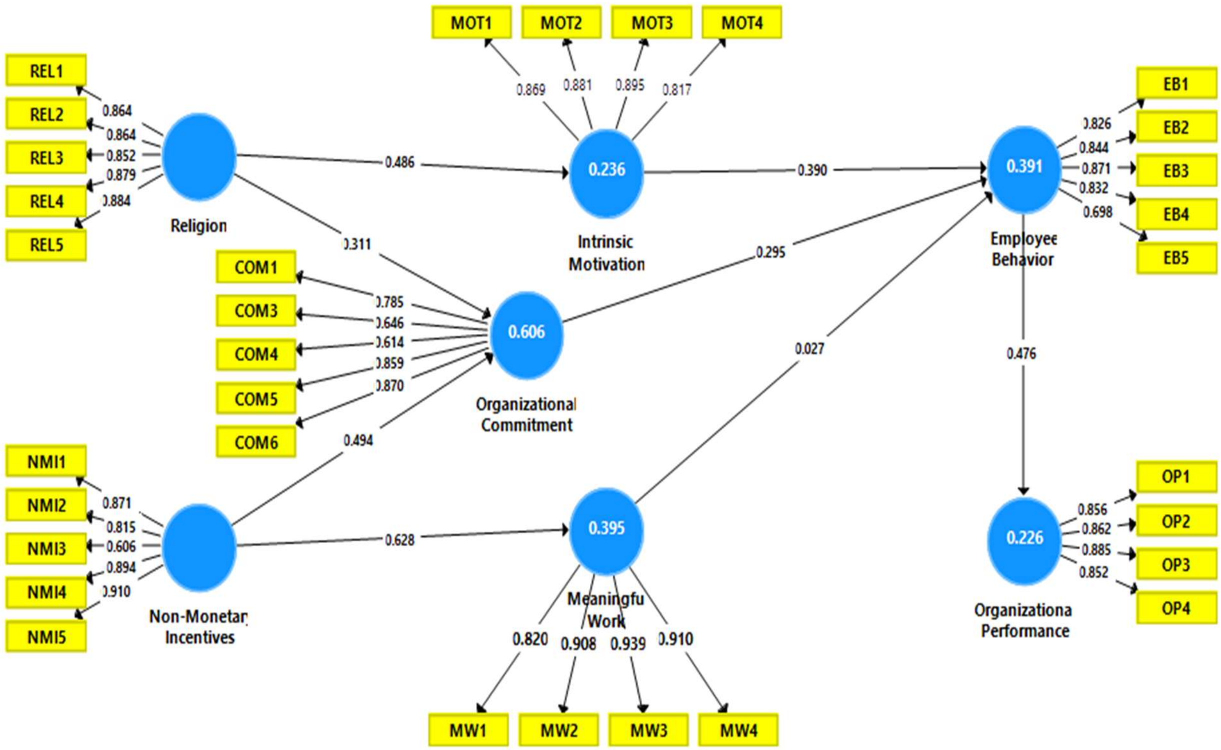


Figure 2: Structural Model

Similarly, all constructs attained Cronbachs Alpha values ranging from 0.817 to 0.919 and Composite Reliability values of between 0.872 and 0.942 which are both above the minimum threshold of 0.70 providing further evidence in support of satisfactory internal consistency reliability. Furthermore, the AVE values ranged between 0.581 and 0.802 (all above the threshold of 0.50), thus providing evidence of convergent validity Further, the bootstrapping results shown within measurement model support confirming that all the adopted indicators were significant at high t-values and have a practical contribution in their constructs. Using the threshold values suggested by Hair et al. (2024). The significance of the measurement model with a minimum score ≥0,70, indicates that the constructs are correctly measured and are adequate for further evaluation of the structural model.

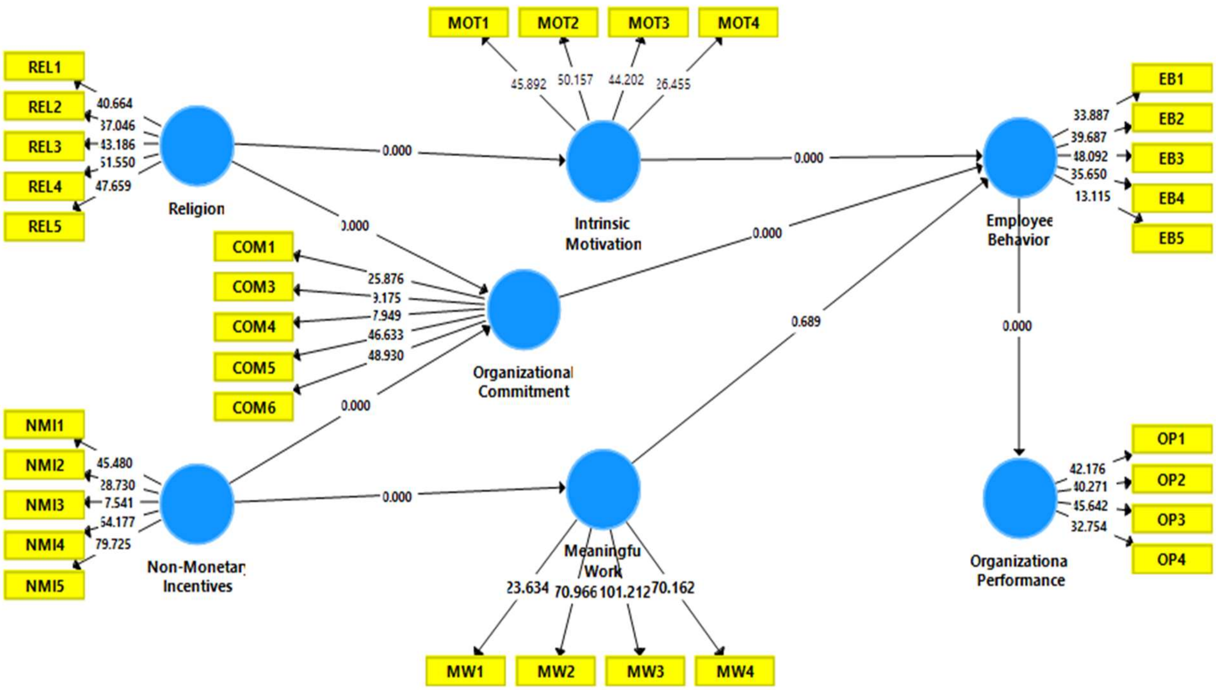


Figure 3: Measurement Model

### 4.6 Hypothesis Testing

The results of the hypothesis testing, including both direct and indirect effects, are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Results of Direct and Indirect Effects

| Hypothesis | Relationship | β (O) | STDEV | t-value | p-value | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | Religion → Intrinsic Motivation | 0.486 | 0.067 | 7.260 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H2 | Religion → Organizational Commitment | 0.311 | 0.085 | 3.667 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H3 | Non-Monetary Incentives → Organizational Commitment | 0.494 | 0.088 | 5.640 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H4 | Non-Monetary Incentives → Meaningful Work | 0.628 | 0.046 | 13.567 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H5 | Intrinsic Motivation → Employee Behavior | 0.390 | 0.063 | 6.182 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H6 | Organizational Commitment → Employee Behavior | 0.295 | 0.073 | 4.051 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H7 | Meaningful Work → Employee Behavior | 0.027 | 0.068 | 0.401 | 0.689 | Not Supported |
| H8 | Employee Behavior → Organizational Performance | 0.476 | 0.060 | 7.876 | 0.000 | Supported |
| Indirect Effects | | | | | | |
| H9 | Religion → Intrinsic Motivation → Employee Behavior | 0.189 | 0.043 | 4.436 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H10 | Religion → Organizational Commitment → Employee Behavior | 0.091 | 0.037 | 2.488 | 0.013 | Supported |
| H11 | Non-Monetary Incentives → Organizational Commitment → Employee Behavior | 0.146 | 0.042 | 3.460 | 0.001 | Supported |

| Hypothesis | Relationship | β (O) | STDEV | t-value | p-value | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H12 | Non-Monetary Incentives → Meaningful Work → Employee Behavior | 0.017 | 0.043 | 0.401 | 0.689 | Not Supported |
| H13 | Intrinsic Motivation → Employee Behavior → Organizational Performance | 0.185 | 0.042 | 4.397 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H14 | Organizational Commitment → Employee Behavior → Organizational Performance | 0.140 | 0.039 | 3.569 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H15 | Meaningful Work → Employee Behavior → Organizational Performance | 0.013 | 0.034 | 0.385 | 0.700 | Not Supported |
| H16 | Religion → Intrinsic Motivation → Employee Behavior → Organizational Performance | 0.090 | 0.028 | 3.233 | 0.001 | Supported |
| H17 | Religion → Organizational Commitment → Employee Behavior → Organizational Performance | 0.044 | 0.019 | 2.335 | 0.020 | Supported |
| H18 | Non-Monetary Incentives → Organizational Commitment → Employee Behavior → Organizational Performance | 0.069 | 0.023 | 3.026 | 0.003 | Supported |
| H19 | Non-Monetary Incentives → Meaningful Work → Employee Behavior → Organizational Performance | 0.008 | 0.021 | 0.382 | 0.702 | Not Supported |

The hypothesis testing results appear in Table 7 we support a hypothesis if the t-value is greater than 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05 The findings showed that Religion significantly increased Intrinsic Motivation ($\beta$ = 0.486, t = 7.260, p<0.001) and Organizational Commitment ($\beta$ = 0.311, t = 3.667, p<0.001); thus H1 and H2 are supported respectively In addition, as Non-Monetary Incentives had a substantial effect on Organizational Commitment ($\beta$ = 0.494, t = 5.640, p<0.001) and Meaningful Work ($\beta$ = 0.628, t = 13.567, p<0.001), H3 and H4 were also supported Additionally, Intrinsic Motivation ($\beta$ = 0.390, t= 6.182, p<0.001) and Organizational Commitment ($\beta$ = 0.295, t = 4.051,p<0.001) also had significant positive influences on Employee Behavior accordingly and these were supported in H5 and H6 hypotheses respectively (Hair et al., 2024). Conversely, Meaningful Work had no significant effect on Employee Behavior ($\beta$ = 0.027, t = 0.401, p = 0.689), then H7 was not supported. Employee Behavior had a significant positive effect on Organizational Performance ($\beta$ = 0.476, t = 7.876, p<(0.001), thus H8 is supported. With respect to the indirect effects, results consistently showed that almost all mediation relationships through Intrinsic Motivation and Organizational Commitment were significant, while none of the mediation paths via Meaningful Work were significant supporting most of our proposed theoretical framework, except for direct and indirect relationships associated with Meaningful Work.

### 4.8 Discussion

The results of this study mostly support the theoretical framework being proposed. Results showed that intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment were affected by religion (as well as internalized values), explaining that employees with stronger religious values tended to be internally motivated and more bonded to their organizations. This would be in line with previous findings of the increase of employee motivation, commitment and workplace attitudes is background to religiously oriented work (Syahir et al., 2025). In addition, the impact of non-monetary rewards on organizational commitment and meaningful work was found to be substantial, emphasizing the role of recognition, autonomy, career development and support from the organization as key drivers for positive attitudes among employees. These findings are in line with the predictions of Self-Determination Theory and previous studies showing that non-financial incentives increase employee commitment and engagement (Irwan et al., 2025; Lejeune&Burnay, 2026; Shah&Jokhi, 2026). The study also concluded that intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment predict employee behaviors which had previously been confirmed as motivated and committed employees tend to perform better by performing high performance behaviors / OCB. These results are in line with previous findings that have foregrounded the role of autonomous motivation and commitment in employee outcomes (Issa&Al-Salami, 2023; Saadi et al., 2023). Regarding meaningful work, significant effects on the behavior of employees were not highlighted which implies that if work is perceived as meaningful this will not necessarily become an organizational behavioral outcome at universities in Iraq, mostly due to a restrictive organization and environmental influences. It was ultimately employee behavior, which had the strongest effect on organizational performance that draws on previous research finding positive links between employee behaviorsand organizational effectiveness (Ramlall, 2008; Organ, 1997). These mediation results also indicated that intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment were important mechanisms by which religion and non-monetary incentives were associated with employee behaviors and organizational performance while meaningful work did not play a significant mediating role. Taken together, these results confirm the role of religion, non-monetary incentivization alongside intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment, in improving employee behaviors and organizational performance at Iraqi universities.

## 5. Conclusion, Recommendations, and Limitations

### 51 Conclusion

This study focuses on the employees working in Iraqi universities to analyze the influence of religion and non-monetary incentives as key managerial attributes that determine employee behavior and consequently organizational performance. Moreover, the study examined whether intrinsic motivation, organizational commitment and meaningful work mediated the relationships among study variables. It was found that religion had a significant and positive impact on both intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment. Likewise, it was revealed that non-monetary incentives had substantial positive effects on both organizational commitment and meaningful work. It also proved that intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment had a positive effect on employee behavior, and employee behaviors increased the organization performance as well. However, the association between meaningful work and employee behaviors was not significant suggesting that meaningful work might not be enough on its own to influence behavioral variables in Iraqi higher education.

Our mediation analysis indicated that intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment mediated the relationships between religion, non-monetary incentives, employee behavior and organizational performance. Compared to meaningful work, which showed no significant mediation effect. These findings suggest the role of psychological and attitudinal mechanisms in bridging organizational practices and personal values to constructive employee outcomes. In summary, this study adds to the existing literature on completed research by providing a framework that integrates religion with non-monetary incentive theory concepts like intrinsic motivation, organizational commitment and meaningful work in terms of employee behavior and its impact on organizational performance along some empirical evidence from the Iraqi higher education sector. The results further reinforce the tenets of Self-Determination Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Social Identity Theory by showing both individual values and organizational practices combine to influence employee behavior that is directly related to organizational performance.

### 5.2 Practical Recommendations

According to the results of the study, practical suggestions for Iraqi university administrators and policymakers are offered. First, the university management needs to accept that religious values work positively to encourage employees towards their motivation and commitments. While institutions may create ethical work environments and therefore should emphasize respect for religion of employees' decisions to practice their religious belief by developing culture based on values.

Secondly: Universities must place more emphasis on non-metric compensation systems. The recognition program, career development opportunities for employees, employee autonomy and decision-making process involvement as well as being organizationally supportive need to be strengthened to increase and sustain employees' commitment and engagement. Third, management should take measures to enhance the intrinsic motivation of employees. How this really is reached when personnel proceed in their jobs are generally: with the aid of occupation enrichment/energy/course training/research chances, and a work setting that engages self-growth&self-explaining. Fourth, universities should solicit organizational commitment by encouraging visible and transparent leadership and communication; fair treatment of employees, use participative decision making within the organization. Such practices can improve employee conduct and ultimately contribute to better institutional performance. Fifth, while meaningful work had no substantial effect on employee behavior in the current study, university leaders should still strive for meaningful work by matching their organizational objectives with employees' personal values and professional goals. Potential enhancements in organizations for the future may bolster a positive influence of meaning on employee outcomes. Lastly, policymakers in the higher education sector must have policies for human resource planning that cover organizational and psychological aspects of employees to enhance their behavior along with organizational performance across all Iraqi universities.

### 5.3 Theoretical Implications

There are multiple theoretical contributions that can be drawn from these findings. First, it furthers the application of Self-Determination Theory by showing that intrinsic motivation is an important pathway between religion and employee behavior. Second, these findings relate to Social Exchange Theory, as they emphasize a major role of organizational commitment in converting non-monetary incentives into positive subsequent behavioral outcomes. Third, the research enhances Social Identity Theory by showing how religious values affect employee attachment to and allegiance with their organizations. In addition, the research fills in a much smaller literature stream on employee behavior and organizational performance in developing-country higher education systems such as that of Iraq.

### 5.4 Limitations of the Study

Despite its contribution, this study could have some limitations that must be considered. First, the study used a cross-sectional research design that restricts examining causal linkages among the variables in the study. Longitudinal research designs explore changes in employee attitudes and behaviors over time and will be more common in future studies. Secondly, the sample is restricted only to employees working in selected Iraqi universities. Hence, these findings may not be generalized to other settings, trades or nations. Third, common method bias and social desirability bias might be present as the study heavily relied on self-reported questionnaire data. Future research could also include data from various sources, such as supervisor ratings and objective performance measures. Fourth, the study used three mediators: intrinsic motivation, organizational commitment and meaningful work. We did not look at any other possible mediators or moderators such as job satisfaction and organizational culture, leadership style, psychological empowerment and employee engagement. the respondents of 248 came from five universities. Using sufficient sample sizes for PLS-SEM, such species or larger and more diverse samples would be appropriate to establish how robust the observations and the study was placed in the cultural and institutional context of Iraqi higher education. Cultural, societal, and organizational factors may have played a pivotal role in the relationships we observed only for Iraq. This model should be tested in other countries and sectors to confirm and further develop the findings.

### 5.5 Future Research Directions

Future researchers are recommended to explore the effect of other mediating and moderating variables such as employee engagement, job satisfaction, organizational culture, leadership style, psychological empowerment and perceived organizational support. Longitudinal and comparative studies involving public and private universities and different countries would provide a better understanding through mechanisms of how religion and non-monetary incentives operate in impacting employee behavior and organizational performance.

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