PERFORMING FAITH AT WORK: DRAMATURGICAL STRATEGIES AND RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION AMONG EMPLOYEES IN ACEH, INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study explores how employees perform and negotiate their religious identities in a professional environment through the dramaturgical perspective of Erving Goffman. The research focuses on Bintang Prima Perkasa, a consumer goods distribution company in Aceh Besar, Indonesia, where Islamic values are deeply integrated into everyday organizational life. Using a qualitative descriptive–analytical approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Participants included managers, supervisors, administrative officers, sales personnel, and delivery staff selected through purposive sampling. The findings show that religiosity in the workplace operates as both a spiritual and social performance. On the front stage, employees express faith through punctual prayer, greeting with *salam*, and participation in collective *pengajian* to project professionalism and integrity. On the back stage, they practice a more personal and emotional form of worship beyond social observation. Religion serves dual functions: socially, it fosters trust, cooperation, and moral discipline; psychologically, it provides emotional stability and stress relief. Supported by organizational facilities, these practices have evolved into institutional norms that strengthen solidarity and moral order. The study concludes that religiosity in this workplace functions as a dramaturgical strategy that integrates faith, ethics, and professionalism, contributing to a cohesive and value-based organizational culture.

Keywords: *Religiosity, Dramaturgy, Impression Management, Workplace Culture, Aceh*

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A. Introduction

In contemporary society, the workplace is no longer a neutral environment detached from personal or cultural values. It has evolved into a social arena where individuals negotiate and perform their identities, beliefs, and values in everyday interactions. Professional settings such as offices, government institutions, and corporate organizations have become stages where people not only demonstrate competence but also express cultural and religious identities. This transformation is evident in the ways organizations accommodate religious practices, including the provision of worship spaces, dress regulations, and recognition of religious holidays. Consequently, the workplace can be understood as a complex social field in which expressions of identity are embedded within the dynamics of professional interaction.

One area that has gained increasing scholarly attention is the manifestation of religious expression within professional environments. In the sociocultural context of Aceh, where religion is deeply integrated into public life, religious expression is not confined to private practice but is actively performed in formal work settings. This phenomenon aligns with the principles of *Siyāsah Syarʿiyyah*, a governance framework based on the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the collective reasoning of scholars. In Aceh, Islamic principles are institutionalized through public policy and implemented by entities such as the *Wilāyat al-Ḥisbah* (WḤ), which monitors the observance of Islamic norms in public life, including within private companies and government offices (Fajarni, 2020). Within this environment, religious expression becomes more than a personal commitment. It represents a form of social performance shaped by legal, moral, and organizational expectations. This condition makes it particularly relevant to examine how employees perform their religious and social roles in professional contexts that emphasize both competence and conformity to religious norms.

Bintang Prima Perkasa, a consumer goods distribution company operating in Aceh Besar, provides a suitable setting for examining these dynamics. As a business entity that connects producers and consumers, the company demands professionalism, efficiency, and intensive interpersonal interaction. Such a workplace context creates opportunities for employees to enact not only their functional roles but also their personal and religious identities. Through these performances, employees align their self-presentation with the cultural and ethical expectations embedded in the organization's work culture (Mulyadi, 2001). From a sociological perspective, religion serves not only as a system of personal belief but also as a social mechanism that fosters order and solidarity. Within the workplace, religious values shape employees' sense of responsibility, ethical behavior, and interpersonal relations. Religious commitment has been found to enhance work ethics and strengthen social bonds among colleagues, thereby contributing to a more harmonious work environment (Muliana & Hidayat, 2022).

Empirical research supports this interpretation. Fitri and Prabowo (2023) found that workplace spirituality fosters a healthy organizational climate and strengthens institutional culture in Islamic higher education institutions. Ningsih (2020) reported that religiosity enhances organizational citizenship behavior and employees' emotional attachment to their institutions. Similarly, Yudiatmaja, Edison, Sulistiowati, Samnuzulsari, and Abdul Malek (2021) demonstrated that religious values positively influence motivation and performance among civil servants. In the private sector, Devori and Suhana (2023) observed that religiosity promotes work engagement and strengthens collegial relationships. Collectively, these studies indicate that religious values in the workplace support both individual identity formation and organizational cohesion.

Despite these insights, few studies have examined how religious expression is *performed* and *negotiated* in daily workplace interactions. The performative dimension of religiosity remains underexplored, particularly through the analytical lens of dramaturgy as proposed by Erving Goffman (1959). The dramaturgical perspective conceptualizes social life as a stage where individuals act out roles before an audience.

Within this framework, individuals engage in impression management across two main settings: the "front stage," where behavior is consciously managed to meet social expectations, and the "back stage," where individuals express themselves more authentically.

The present study seeks to analyze how employees at Bintang Prima Perkasa Aceh Besar construct and express their religious identities using dramaturgical strategies. The research focuses on three specific objectives. The first is to identify the various forms of religious expression manifested within the workplace. The second is to examine the social functions of these expressions in shaping self-presentation and professional relationships. The third is to explore the dramaturgical strategies employees employ when expressing their religious identities in interactions with colleagues and supervisors. This study contributes to the theoretical development of organizational sociology by integrating dramaturgical analysis into the study of workplace religiosity, a perspective that has received limited attention in Indonesian scholarship. In addition to its theoretical implications, the study offers practical insights for organizations that seek to create inclusive and value-sensitive work environments. By understanding how employees perform religiosity within professional contexts, organizations can better design policies and practices that promote both spiritual well-being and professional integrity.

B.   Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive–analytical design to explore the meanings embedded in employees' everyday interactions at Bintang Prima Perkasa Aceh Besar. The approach was chosen for its ability to capture social phenomena within their natural context and to describe them holistically through language and narrative. As emphasized by Moleong (2017), qualitative research seeks to understand lived experiences in depth and in their contextual setting. In this study, theory functioned as an interpretive tool rather than a hypothesis to be verified, consistent with Sugiyono's (2019) view that theory in qualitative inquiry serves as a guide for analysis. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective provided the analytical lens to interpret how employees perform and negotiate religious identities in their front-stage and back-stage interactions.

The research was conducted at Bintang Prima Perkasa, a consumer goods distribution company in Aceh Besar. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure they possessed substantial experience and familiarity with the organizational culture. The sample included supervisors, managers, administrative officers, sales staff, and delivery drivers with at least two years of service. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation review. The interview guide was designed to elicit participants' perceptions, practices, and interpretations of religiosity in professional relations, following qualitative instrument design principles proposed by Englund, Gerdin, and Burns (2020).

Data analysis was conducted inductively through iterative coding, categorization, and thematic synthesis. The process aimed to connect emerging empirical patterns with

dramaturgical concepts while maintaining theoretical sensitivity. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentation enhanced the validity of the findings, and reflexive memo writing supported analytical consistency. Ethical standards were strictly observed: participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was ensured throughout the research process.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

1) Organizational Context of Bintang Prima Perkasa

Bintang Prima Perkasa is a consumer goods distributor established in 2000 in Sigli, Aceh Province, by H. Armia HM Daud. The company expanded in 2003 through formal recruitment and the formation of structured divisions. In 2007 a branch opened in Aceh Besar to increase efficiency and coverage in the Banda Aceh area. The organization now employs thirty-seven staff working in administration and finance, sales, delivery, promotion, and motoris. The administrative and financial unit has seven staff who manage documentation and accounting. Nine sales officers handle marketing and customer relations. Nine delivery workers manage product transport. Six Sales Promotion Girls promote products at outlets. Three motorist cover smaller routes. The hierarchy is led by Director H. Armia HM Daud, supported by Vice Director Sherly Lavita, Manager Maiyani, and Supervisor M. Yusuf. The company distributes home care products such as Vape and Glade, skincare and cosmetics such as Viva, Safi, and Enchanter, baby care such as Cussons, automotive products, and snacks. The formal structure and interdivisional coordination create a workplace where professional duties and religious values meet in daily interaction.

2) Forms of Religious Expression and Institutional Support

Field observations and interviews show that religious expression is both personal and institutional in the company's culture. Employees greet colleagues with *salam*, perform shalat on time, and attend weekly *pengajian*. These practices are facilitated through a prayer room and flexibility during prayer times. Fakhruddin, the warehouse head, explained, "Performing prayer on time and holding weekly *pengajian* have been part of our work culture. These activities strengthen social bonds and bring calmness in the midst of work pressure" (field interview, 2025). Manager Maiyani added, "Consistency in prayer and greeting with *salam* are not only religious obligations but also a way of showing respect and professionalism toward others" (field interview, 2025). These accounts indicate that religious behavior operates on the front stage in Goffman's terms. Employees consciously align visible religiosity with workplace norms in order to project moral discipline, integrity, and reliability.

3) Front Stage and Back Stage Performance of Religiosity

Interviews reveal a clear distinction between front stage and back stage expressions of faith. On the front stage religiosity is performed strategically to meet social and organizational expectations. Supervisor Yusuf stated, "I try to maintain fairness and

religious discipline so that my subordinates see me as a model they can trust" (field interview, 2025). Back stage religiosity is more personal and emotionally expressive. Sales officer Antony Yodie described, "At home, I can be more emotional when praying, sometimes even crying during doa. In the office, I stay composed and professional" (field interview, 2025). He also noted, "When meeting non-Muslim visitors or clients, I try to adjust so that my behavior remains professional without showing exclusivity" (field interview, 2025). These narratives show impression management in practice. Employees navigate authenticity and performance as they move across social spaces.

4) The Social and Psychological Roles of Religion

Religious practice provides a social code and an emotional resource for employees. It nurtures honesty, cooperation, self-control, and mutual respect. It also supports composure under pressure. Rahmad Mikail, a delivery driver, said, "It is important to behave and speak according to Islamic teachings. For me, honesty, helping others, and avoiding gossip are acts of worship that maintain good relationships" (field interview, 2025). Yusuf explained, "When the pressure gets high, I take a short break to pray. It helps me calm down and think clearly" (field interview, 2025). Asvinda, an administrative officer, shared, "Taking time to pray during work gives me mental rest. Even ablution makes me feel calm and focused" (field interview, 2025). Junaidi, a delivery staff member, recalled, "At first, only a few of us prayed together. Gradually, others joined in, and now it has become a shared routine for everyone" (field interview, 2025). These testimonies show that religion sustains solidarity and emotional balance. Collective rituals foster belonging and empathy, while personal devotion restores focus and inner peace.

5) Dramaturgical Strategies in Religious Expression

Analysis of interview data identifies five strategies that employees use to express and sustain religious values in professional life.

Table 1
Dramaturgical Strategies of Religious Expression among Employees of Bintang Prima Perkasa Aceh Besar

Dramaturgical Strategy	Description and Illustration
Front stage religious performance	Employees display punctual shalat, greetings, and attendance at *pengajian* in order to project professionalism and moral integrity. Example: Manager Maiyani views piety as part of responsible leadership.
Differentiation between front and back stage	Private worship is more emotional and spontaneous. Workplace practice is moderated in line with social norms. Example: Sales officer Antony Yodie feels freer at home but more controlled in the office.

Religion as an ethical framework	Islamic teachings guide daily interaction and help avoid conflict. Example: Driver Rahmad Mikail treats ethical conduct as a form of worship.
Moral leadership and impression management	Supervisors and managers perform religiosity to reinforce moral authority and inspire subordinates. Example: Supervisor Yusuf maintains fairness and piety to build trust.
Horizontal reproduction of values	Religious routines begin as peer initiatives and grow into institutional norms. Example: Delivery staff member Junaidi helped initiate group prayer that later became a shared routine.

Source: Field interviews, 2025.

Religiosity at Bintang Prima Perkasa Aceh Besar is a shared social practice within a professional setting. It functions as spiritual devotion, ethical discipline, and dramaturgical performance. Through visible practice on the front stage and sincere reflection in the back stage, employees construct identities that harmonize faith and professionalism. Religious routines, supported by the organization, enhance solidarity, moral awareness, and psychological well-being. In this way religion shapes conduct, supports emotional resilience, and strengthens a cohesive workplace culture.

2. Discussion

The findings reveal that the daily religious practices of employees at Bintang Prima Perkasa Aceh Besar reflect a social performance that can be best understood through the dramaturgical framework developed by Erving Goffman (1959). Within this framework, social life is seen as a performance where individuals act as players on a stage, consciously presenting themselves in specific ways before an audience. The concepts of the front stage and the back stage help explain how employees construct and perform religious identity in the workplace.

On the front stage, employees engage in visible religious practices such as greeting with *salam*, performing *shalat* on time, and joining collective prayers and *pengajian*. These actions are not only expressions of faith but also deliberate performances designed to align with organizational norms and expectations. Employees understand that these behaviors communicate trustworthiness, discipline, and integrity. For instance, Supervisor Yusuf expressed that maintaining a religious image was essential to demonstrate moral leadership and to gain the respect of his subordinates (field interview, 2025). Similarly, Maiyani described visible piety as part of professional identity, showing how religiosity becomes both a spiritual and social tool for impression management in a professional environment. Read through Goffman, these front stage performances are consistent with negotiated symbolic boundaries observed in Acehnese community life, where institutions help stabilize everyday tolerance while some minority expressions remain private (Muhammad et al., 2025).

In contrast, back stage religiosity represents a more personal and authentic space where individuals can express spiritual emotions freely without social observation. Antony Yodie described this as a form of release and reflection, explaining that at home he can be emotional and cry during prayer while at work he maintains composure (field interview, 2025). This difference confirms Goffman's claim that individuals navigate between controlled performance and authentic emotion depending on context and audience. The duality between these two stages highlights that employees consciously manage how they express religiosity in different settings, balancing sincerity with social expectations.

The dramaturgical performance of religion also interacts with organizational structures in ways that support both social cohesion and moral order. Religious routines such as congregational prayers and weekly *pengajian* are institutionally supported through the provision of facilities and flexible schedules. This indicates that management acknowledges religiosity as part of organizational ethics. Comparable evidence from Aceh based Islamic boarding school initiatives shows that participatory and collaborative programs can translate religious routines into stable moral orders supported by institutional practice (Nurlaila et al., 2025). Such accommodation strengthens solidarity among employees, transforming personal acts of worship into collective rituals that reinforce belonging. As described by Junaidi, the practice of group prayer emerged from individual initiative and gradually became a shared organizational norm (field interview, 2025). This transformation from individual to collective practice aligns with Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration, where social structures are both the medium and the outcome of human action. Employees act as agents who reproduce and reshape workplace norms through repeated religious performance.

From a sociological perspective, the study demonstrates that religion in the workplace serves not only as spiritual guidance but also as a framework for ethical conduct and emotional balance. Religious behavior provides a moral vocabulary through which employees interpret their responsibilities and relationships. It encourages honesty, mutual respect, and emotional restraint, all of which are crucial in maintaining a positive work climate. The social function of religion operates through the construction of a shared moral identity, while its psychological function lies in its ability to relieve stress and restore mental focus. Asvinda's reflection on finding calmness through prayer and ablution illustrates this therapeutic role (field interview, 2025).

The interaction between dramaturgical performance and structural context thus produces a dynamic space where religiosity becomes an organizing principle of professional life. Employees use religious expression to negotiate meaning, legitimacy, and authority within their organizational setting. Leaders like Yusuf enact piety to maintain moral credibility, while staff members use collective prayer as a means to affirm solidarity. The organization, in turn, institutionalizes these practices, confirming that the boundaries between spiritual and professional life are fluid rather than separate.

The discussion highlights that the expression of religiosity among employees at Bintang Prima Perkasa Aceh Besar illustrates how faith can be both performed and

internalized within a professional system. Through the dramaturgical process, religion becomes a social performance that maintains moral order and mutual respect. Through the logic of structuration, these practices evolve into an integral part of the company's culture. Therefore, religiosity functions as both a personal conviction and a collective structure that shapes professional identity and organizational harmony.

D. Conclusion

This study finds that the religious expression of employees at Bintang Prima Perkasa Aceh Besar is a conscious and dynamic practice shaped by individual belief and by the norms of the organization. Verbal, symbolic, and ritual acts, such as greeting with *salam*, wearing religious attire, performing daily prayers, and taking part in *pengajian*, serve not only as personal devotion but also as social performances that reinforce trust, solidarity, and ethical discipline within the company. Through Goffman's dramaturgical lens, employees perform faith across two social settings. On the front stage they express religiosity through disciplined and respectful conduct that projects professionalism, honesty, and reliability. On the back stage they experience religion more privately and emotionally, free from workplace expectations. This dual performance shows how religious identity is managed and adapted to audience and context, balancing authenticity with professionalism while remaining grounded in Islamic values.

Religious expression also performs clear social and psychological roles. Socially, it supports moral behavior, mutual trust, and cooperation among colleagues. Psychologically, it provides emotional calm, reduces work stress, and strengthens mental balance. Spirituality therefore enriches professional life through ethical reflection and emotional stability rather than standing apart from it. Applying Giddens's theory of structuration, the study shows that employees are active agents who reproduce and reshape organizational culture through routine religious practices. Shared prayers, flexible worship times, and collective moral commitments have become part of the institutional structure. Religion operates both as a guiding value system and as a stabilizing force that maintains the organization's moral coherence.

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