Managing religion at work: a necessary distinction between words and deeds. A multiple case study of the postures facing religious expression in French organizations

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A multiple case study of the postures of religious expression in French organizations

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Religious expression at work (REW) has a unique place in France. We studied the perception of the *postures* of four organizations in the face of this phenomenon, focusing on the gap between official posture and the posture applied by managers.

Method: Using a qualitative approach, we conducted semi-structured interviews (40), observation periods, and documentary analysis within four organizations. This multiple embedded case study was undertaken in four different firms in France: an international private firm, a public organization, and two small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with original models of REW management.

Findings: A distinction between aligned and non-aligned postures emerged. There was a lack of alignment in only two of the four organizations, and this alignment concerned only two units of analysis: prayer on break and wearing religious symbols. Several extrinsic factors were identified in this lack of alignment between the official posture and the posture actually applied by managers: the form of REW, the religion concerned and whether it had minority status in the country, the degree of clarity of the official posture, the degree of formalization of the official posture, the size and scope of the company, the degree of awareness of managers and their teams, the degree of involvement of leaders in the definition and implementation of the posture, and the purpose of the official posture.

Research implications: This research provides a sensitive understanding of religious expression at work, and shows that alignment is sought specifically for each form of REW. The distinction between official posture and applied posture is highlighted through the study of perceptions. In

addition, this study enables the identification of factors that influence the alignment of official and operational postures.

Practical and social implications: These results call for clarity of the official posture and for it to be defended by leaders, provision of meaning to postures by raising awareness among intermediate hierarchical lines, understanding of the applicable legal framework to transpose it to the local level, and analysis of unaligned forms of REW to build a strong, shared posture.

Originality/value: This study, which was carried out within a specific French context, concerns areas that have received little attention or have not been studied at all to date, such as REW in SMEs or in the public sector, and demonstrates for the first time the distinction between official postures and effective postures.

Keywords: Religious expression at work (REW), regulatory postures, forms of religious expression, aligned postures, multiple case study, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

Religious expression at work (REW) remains a largely overlooked issue in the area of diversity (Héliot *et al.*, 2020; King *et al.,* 2009), even though several studies attest to its growing importance in organizations (e.g., Gebert *et al.*, 2014). A partial explanation for this paradox is the taboo nature of the subject (Geld and Longacre, 2012), especially in France (Honoré *et al.*, 2019). Several studies have highlighted the unique model of separation of church and state in France, particularly the place this gives religion (e.g., Cintas *et al.*, 2020; Galindo and Zannad, 2015; Hennekam *et al.,* 2018). In France, as a result of this model, the concept of reasonable accommodation is different from that in other Anglo-Saxon countries (Bader *et al.*, 2013; Honoré, 2018). In accordance with French law, it is up to the employee to accommodate their religious practice to work-related constraints. In addition, Volia *et al.* (2019) noted that REW was more

often studied in Anglo-Saxon studies for what it could bring to organizations, whereas it is more readily treated as a constraint to be managed in Francophone work environments.

REW generally appears to be in a state of maturity in French organizations, i.e., it is a phenomenon experienced by managers, and increasingly well managed (*Observatoire du Fait Religieux en Entreprise, Trans.*: Observatory of REW, OFRE, 2019), although two different situations are observable: (1) in most organizations, it is well managed, and few organizations are faced with a high density of REW (i.e., high frequency of occurrences, diversity of REW forms, individual and collective REW), and (2) the situation is problematic and emphasizes the role that managers must assume (Honoré, 2020). More than half of French managers are confronted with REW on a regular or occasional basis (OFRE, 2019). These encounters mainly include the wearing of religious symbols, requests for absence to participate in worship, requests for time adjustments for the same reasons, or, less frequently, the refusal to execute a task or engage in work with a person of the opposite sex.

French organizations seek to regulate this expression through various *postures* (Galindo and Zannad, 2015), that is, the strategic and operational positioning of REW. Few studies deal with the distinction between these postures, and none deal with the gap between the official postures and the perception of these postures by teams. Therefore, the aim of the current work is to identify them by studying the perceptions that managers and their teams have of these postures. To this end, we will study the forms of REW (OFRE, 2013–2020) and their contexts of expression within four different organizations.

1. Literature review

1.1 Religious expression at work in the French context

REW is an increasingly important organizational phenomenon, particularly in secularized societies (Bader *et al.*, 2013; Cash and Grey, 2000; Cintas *et al.*, 2020; Gebert *et al.*, 2014; Gundolf and Filser, 2013; King, 2008), even though it has been largely marginalized in workplace

diversity research (Héliot *et al.*, 2020). In France, religious expression began appearing in research at the end of the 2000s (Honoré *et al.*, 2020; Volia *et al.*, 2019). The specificity in the French context, because of its separation of church and state (*laïcité*), makes it a unique research field (Cintas *et al.*, 2013). Although all French citizens benefit from the freedom of conscience (i.e., the freedom to think as an individual, independently of what other people in society think), as guaranteed by law, public officials must remain neutral in the exercise of their duties. Employees in the private sector enjoy freedom of worship within the limits of public order, and the restrictions set by the Labor Code. In Table I, we summarize the legal context regarding REW in France (Cintas *et al.*, 2020; Gaillard, 2019, 2020; Hennekam *et al.*, 2018; Honoré *et al.*, 2019).

Type	**Private firms**	**Public firms**
Reference texts	Labor Code (last amended by Act No. 2016–1088 of August 8, 2016)	Separation of the church and the state (law of 1905) Rights and obligations of civil servants (law of July 13, 1983)
Consequence of the laws	Freedom of conscience and freedom of worship Prohibition as an exception according to five criteria: hygiene, safety of property and persons, functioning of the company, commercial interest and image of the company, proselytism Possibility by law to use internal rules to limit REW, but not in a general or in an absolute way (i.e., justification and proportionality of the limitation)	Freedom of conscience and neutrality of agents Ministerial circular of Sept. 23, 1967, on special leave of absence (notably for religious holidays), which implies an official decision by the elected officials who manage the public company
Legal tools	The internal rules are a legally enforceable document.	Special authorization for absence is granted on the basis of a list of holidays, which is updated annually.

Table I: French legal context regarding REW

Several definitions of REW exist (Honoré *et al.*, 2019). Here, we consider it the set of behaviors that arise from the interpretation of religious doctrine to which a follower refers and that occur in a professional context, as well as associated reactions, whether direct or indirect, immediate or

delayed. Thus, REW is polyform, polysemic, multifactor, and situational (Cintas *et al.*, 2020; Cui *et al.*, 2015; Gaillard, 2019; Honoré, 2020; Honoré *et al.*, 2019).

1.2 The four levels of studying REW: A dynamic and situational perspective

REW categorization tests are common in the literature, and several levels of study can be observed. We can distinguish at least four levels: forms, actors, situations, and postures.

Honoré (2020) distinguished four main types of situations marked by religious expression: invisible, normalized, deviant, and transgressive. Other research has focused on the question of identity, describing religion as a "powerful internal referent" (Cintas *et al.*, 2012, p.83).

Since 2013, various forms of REW have been studied in France (Honoré, 2014; OFRE, 2013–2020). More recently, researchers have focused on the display and concealment strategies of employees who wear the Islamic veil at work (Chenigle *et al.*, 2020), which is in line with the work on identity management (e.g., Clair *et al.*, 2015). The forms of REW most frequently observed in France are requests related to work time (29%; e.g., time adjustments for religious reasons such as fasting and requests for absence to participate in a religious celebration), the wearing of a religious sign (24%; e.g., cross, veil, or turban), attitudes toward women (14%; e.g., refusal to work with a woman, refusal to work after a woman, or refusal to work under the command of a woman), and prayer during a break (13%; OFRE, 2020, p.16). Among these forms, Honoré distinguished between those that question the organization and its functioning (i.e., prayer during work time or refusal to work with a woman) and those that do not (i.e., request for absence, wearing a religious sign, or prayer during a break; OFRE, 2019, p.42).

Other studies focus on the behavior of managers regarding REW (Cintas *et al.*, 2020; Guillet, 2020; Guillet and Brasseur, 2019), the role played by tensions experienced in work situations (Volia, 2020), and managerial strategies at the individual level that deal with religious issues at work (Hennekam *et al.*, 2018). Three strategies are identified as follows: (1) "a strategy of flexibility within the rules," (2) "a separation strategy," and (3) a "common ground strategy,"

which includes managers who use corporate culture to search for common ground (Hennekam *et al.*, 2018). Cintas *et al.* (2020) included the crucial role played by three factors in the intention to seek accommodation for the REW: (1) organizational flexibility, (2) perceived consequences, and (3) the religiosity of the manager, which was also important for Guillet (2020). Some authors have shown that the religiosity of leaders had a positive influence on openness to religious diversity, but did so without making the link with *postures* toward REW (Cui *et al.*, 2015).

Galindo and Zannad (2015) studied organizations and their management of REW, and identified the following postures: (1) denial and refusal, (2) tolerance/laxism, or (3) accommodation/compromise. These postures were analyzed based on the study of internal guides concerning REW in large nonstate firms in France. The authors were mainly interested in the postures displayed by leaders and diversity managers, not in the perceptions of these postures by managers and their teams, who were in charge of enforcing and applying them, respectively (Galindo and Zannad, 2015). However, in an earlier work (Galindo and Surply, 2010), one of the authors insisted on the explicative power of Reynaud's theory of social regulation (1979), which presented the rules of control (decreed by the top) and the autonomous rules (constructed by the actors), and the friction between these two types of rules that could lead to a process of joint regulation.

These four levels must be considered from a dynamic and situational perspective. In concrete terms, when an employee manifests their religion at work in a certain way, the manager's behavior interacts with what they know about the company's posture, the law, the relationship they personally have with religion, and the perception of transgression that they have of this form. Moreover, team cohesion, the legal environment, and the corporate culture leads both the employee expressing their religion and their manager to anticipate the reactions of their colleagues (including those who do not express their religion), and/or take as a reference the behavior of practicing believers at work, co-religionists, or those belonging to another religion.

There are constraints linked to the distribution of work, the nature of relationships between managers and employees, and spatial constraints. Moreover, the density of REW—a concept measured by a series of indicators recently proposed by Honoré (OFRE, 2019; 2020)—measures "the way in which the presence of the religious fact has an impact on the work and management situation" (OFRE, 2020, p.43). Thus, it measures two elements—the presence and influence of REW—from a situational perspective. The density impacts the functioning of the firm and the behavior of the actors, and changes the way they look at REW within work situations. In this study, we are particularly interested in the perceptions of the postures by managers and their teams, and in understanding the gaps between the official posture and the one applied at the operational level.

1.3 Research questions

To the best of our knowledge, no previous study has analyzed the perceptions of the postures that organizations claim to implement, and no research has addressed the distinction between postures based on religious forms of expression. Therefore, we studied ***the distinction between official postures and those applied by managers.*** Two research questions are posed: (**RQ1**) How do employees perceive the postures of their organizations on the forms of REW? (**RQ2)** What are the forms of REW that distinguish these postures? (**RQ3)** What are the factors that influence the gap between the official posture and the one applied by managers?

2. Design and methods

2.1. An embedded multiple case study

Yin defines a case study as "a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (1981, p.59). We chose the embedded multiple case study for our research (Yin, 2009). To do this, using the units of analysis (forms of REW), we studied employees' perceptions of posture in four French organizations.

2.2. Case search and selection

Our work was guided by a search for significance, that is, to highlight the diversity of postures that exist in France. We chose to search for organizations based on three criteria that emerged from the empirical richness of the collected data: (1) sector (more concerned with REW, or given little attention in the literature); (2) originality of the posture stated by the representative; and (3) diversity in the size of organizations. To get in touch with the organizations, several methods were used: direct approach (Case 1), cooptation (Cases 2 and 3), and call for testimonials through social networks (Case 4).

2.3. Sampling and data collection

Data collection (Table II) took place between March 2016 and July 2019. Using triangulation, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant and nonparticipant observation (primary data), and internal and external document analysis (secondary data). In total, we conducted 40 semi-structured interviews with employees and managers from four organizations (Appendix 1).

Sources cases[1]	Number of interviews	Observation	Internal and external document analysis
ALIMENTARUS	13	X	Internal rules; website; procedures; security; and REW
COLLECTISTE	14	X	Charter of *laïcité*; rules of procedure; pedagogical scenario (*laïcité* training course)
EMANCE	8	X	Internal rules; library; cohesion room rules
OPENISLA	5	X	17 press articles; 2 video reports

Table II: Data collected

[1] At the request of the organizations, we gave them pseudonyms for anonymity.

Each semi-structured interview included a hypothetical scenario. We identified the situations provided by the OFRE and asked the following question: "What do you think your organization's position is with respect to this situation?"

	Situations adapted from the OFRE reports (2013–2019)
1	One of your colleagues asks to be absent to observe a religious celebration or attend a religious event.
2	One morning, one of your colleagues shows up at work for the first time with a religious sign (e.g., veil, cross, or yarmulke).
3	Some employees ask for confessional menus certified by an institution of their faith at lunchtime[2].
4	A colleague is fasting and wishes for a few days to reorganize their working hours.
5	One of your colleagues is engaging in prayer at their workplace during break time.
6	A colleague discusses religion with another colleague. Their expressions show an intention to convince the other.
7	A colleague refuses to carry out a task by calmly explaining that it is contrary to their religious principles.
8	A colleague tells you that they prefer to avoid working in contact with a person of the opposite sex, citing religious reasons.

Table III: Situations adapted from the OFRE reports (2013–2019)

We made sure that all individuals were given the same wording to ensure the comparability of the data. In previous research, this topic has proven to be particularly sensitive in many organizations; the subject matter itself has been widely presented as sensitive in previous work, involving, for example, the fear of being perceived as antireligious (Honoré *et al.*, 2019).

To triangulate the data, observation periods were conducted in each organization. Using a logbook, we observed the behavior of the actors in the professional context. For ethical reasons, we announced our status as observers and, if necessary, asked them to explain a particular behavior. For Cases 1 and 2, we visited at least four different sites to ensure the richness of observations. For Cases 3 and 4, we went to a single site. It was therefore a direct, undisguised, structured, selective, and human observation (*Synth:* Adler and Adler, 1994; Paterson *et al.*, 2003; Smit and Onwuegbuzie, 2018; Werner and Schoepfle, 1987).

[2] Situation 3 was excluded from the analysis following a confrontation within the field.

2.4. Presentation of selected cases

We present the selected cases in Table IV, describing the interests of the cases, their characteristics, and their diversity strategies and REW management tools.

Cases	(1) ALIMENTARUS	(2) COLLECTISTE	(3) EMANCE	(4) OPENISLA
Type	French division of a multinational B2B services company whose core business is contract catering	Territorial collectivity, more particularly, a town hall	Digital services company	SME specializing in wholesale trade in the halal food market
Case interest	Large international private companies are interesting because these firms are more visible and their practices are more formalized (Galindo and Zannad, 2015). The international dimension and its effects on the national management of the phenomenon is also interesting.	The public sector has never been studied in France (Volia *et al.*, 2019). In France, public agents must not express their religion at work, and must be neutral (this is called "duty of neutrality").	This is a company that organizes debates at work on religious issues (Gaillard and Jolivet, 2019). This case is original and interesting because it confronts religious options in the context of work.	In this affinity company (Islamic), internal rules are based on the Muslim religion. It is interesting because it allows us to study the role of leaders (Hennekam *et al.*, 2018) and the link between the values claimed and displayed and their operational actions (Honoré *et al.*, 2019).
Important attributes	400,000 employees worldwide in 2016; 34,000 in France, including 3,000 executives; 18th largest employer worldwide; turnover of €20 billion in 2017	Public organization located in the west of France; Communist mayor; includes two very underprivileged neighborhoods; 10,000 inhabitants; 280 staff including 80 contractual employees in 2016	Located in the west of France: the director insisted on not specifying the geographical scale so as "not to disrupt my [his] project, and at the request of my [his] staff."; 17 employees attached to the structure	Located in the Paris region; Turnover of 14.000.000€ in 2017; 14 employees employed by the company (and occasional temporary workers)
Diversity policy	Promote diversity and respect minorities as a cornerstone of the company's culture, to provide an inclusive work environment (company website)	No formalized diversity policy except for the priority in recruitment of agents domiciled in the city	No formalized diversity policy, but a project clearly oriented toward the religious freedom of its employees	No formalized diversity policy, but a leader who presents his structure as completely open to REW, himself being a practicing Muslim and claiming to have been discriminated against in the past

REW Tools and practices	• Time arrangements for religious celebrations and fasting • Diversity department • Inclusion training	• Informal time arrangements for religious celebrations and fasting in some departments only	• Multi-faith library • Time for confrontation of religious opinions during working hours • Prayer corner in the common break room • Funding occasional religious or philosophical activities	• Prayer room • Time arrangements during Ramadan • Closure of Muslim religious celebrations

Table IV: Presentation of selected cases

2.5. Data analysis

All interviews were processed according to the recommendations of Patton (1990) and Miles and Huberman (2003), and we fully transcribed the interviews. For each interview, we built a summary sheet and then used manual thematic coding of the data. We carried out coding according to the perceived postures for each unit of analysis: (1) perceptions of authorization, (2) perceptions of prohibition, and (3) unknown. This coding approach responded to a concern to secure the analysis, which also resulted in the practice of peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.308) at several stages of the analysis to ensure the introduction of bias was minimized.

3. Results

3.1. Mainly banalized forms of REW

Units of analysis subject to consensual perceptions of authorization

Requests for absence to observe religious celebrations and time arrangements to observe a fast were subject to permission.

Absence requests for religious celebrations. In all four case studies, the request for absence resulted in a request for paid or other leave. Requesting time off for this reason required the decision maker to take into account the organization of work. Managers and diversity managers recommended that their employees not express that it was a request to attend a religious service or participate in a party. People who made these requests confirmed that they did not always say that this was why they were requesting time off, even though they stated that their colleagues in general "*know why*" (19). This recommendation was particularly pronounced in the public sector, where the display of religious beliefs is less readily accepted.

One of them stated that one day, one of his time off requests for Eid was refused and that the arguments put forward convinced him because the reasons only concerned work. When refusals

occur, they are motivated by work obligations and the necessity of the company's operations. It seems advisable not to announce that it is a request on religious grounds.

Time arrangements for fasting. All companies implemented an authorization posture, with conditions on compatibility with the continuity of company activity and the completion of work. Getting time adjustments was possible, and perceived as possible, and was also possible for reasons other than fasting: "*The only question to be asked is the impact on the service, if there is no impact, I don't see the problem, also making sure that the person who has to accompany his kid to a soccer game will be able to obtain the same authorization*" (1). Some individuals nevertheless pointed to difficulties in applying this organizational authorization posture, not only for purely operational reasons, but also in terms of comparing the measures taken at headquarters with those taken by operational teams. This situation was observed in three companies, while EMANCE's operation and flexible working hours were enshrined in employment contracts: "*We don't work with time clocks, we don't work with schedules, we work with goals, and what matters is that they are achieved, as long as it's planned with everyone, it's completely possible and standardized"* (28). For EMANCE, COLLECTISTE, and ALIMENTARUS, authorization was perceived as allowing a conciliation between personal and professional life, which seemed to be part of the guidelines of the structures. For OPENISLA, it seemed natural for individuals to accompany these kinds of initiatives for those who wished to do so: "*Once I was so tired, it was Ramadan, they let me go a little bit earlier. The others understood, they did a good deed with that, not every day, but if we can help each other, we help each other, that's also what religion is all about*" (39). When refusals occurred, they were motivated by the content of the work and the necessity of the company's operations (i.e., its performance objectives or needs with specific time slots). Some dysfunctions were noted, either because they corresponded to a diversity of rules between the headquarters and decentralized sites, or because the authorization was more or less

extensive than for a request of another type (e.g., for sports or an associative commitment). This implies that prioritization was sometimes considered difficult to justify.

Units of analysis subject to consensual perceptions of prohibition

Refusal to execute a task. Refusing to perform a task was unanimously perceived as unacceptable. In all organizations, the impossibility of accepting such behavior was confirmed by all interviewees, such as when it came to the distribution of work in teams. For OPENISLA, the reasons given were different. Individuals who refused to execute tasks contrary to their religious principles went to organizations such as OPENISLA (i.e., companies that take into account their own religious prohibitions). The leader found the prohibition normal, but did not see when he could apply it.

> S*o we work here, but hey, I'm Muslim, so we don't sell pork, but halal meat, so here we are, the one who refuses for religious reasons, I don't see why, unless he doesn't want to sell halal. We didn't have the case, but if that happened, the guy would have to leave because we only sell that here (laughs), then I understand on the moral level that we don't want to do something, but we have to leave when we can and otherwise we have to be patient*. (36)

The probability that a mission is incompatible with Islam in this organization is therefore nil.

Refusal to work with a person of the opposite sex. Refusal to work with a person of the opposite sex seemed unacceptable to the respondents in our four organizations. First, because it had an impact on the composition of the teams, which was not acceptable for interviewees. "*It's unacceptable, the company manages its teams, and divides the work not according to gender but according to skills, whoever is not part of this reflection can't be here, we have a machine to run*" (7). Other individuals put forward the idea that one could not choose one's colleagues for any reason at work, and that gender was no exception in this regard. "*What is the image we send back*

of women if we tolerate that? Well, you don't say it's women, but we know it's always women. We have to be uncompromising on the place of women in the company. 'Women are men like any other', isn't that what we say now?" (32). The ban was also part of a broader organizational policy: "*Equality between men and women is not negotiable, we are in France, it took us a long time to win this, we defend it here as well, every day"* (9).

At OPENISLA, the manager himself acknowledged that he did not shake hands with women, although he remained flexible and could understand that one may not want physical contact or to be isolated in a room with a person of the opposite sex.

> *I don't deliberately put two people of the opposite sex in the same closed room, because it's true that for us* [Muslims], *it's not recommended, but the priority is work. If the accountant has to summon a person and talk to him, she does it, she's not going to go for a walk with him. If tomorrow we have to work in pairs and one of them says no, I don't work with a woman, I'll tell him, 'Well, go home if you don't work with a woman, set up your business with some guys'."* (36)

These forms of REW led to unanimous and shared reactions in the organizations concerned. In other words, they did not explain what clearly distinguished operational postures from official postures. We could not use the results concerning proselytism because in two organizations, we did not collect sufficient data about it. In the other two, it was either trivialized (i.e., by the *disputatio* at EMANCE), or not relevant because the entire workforce belonged to the same religion. Finally, respect for the contractual obligation, gender equality, and the relative autonomy of time or vacation entitlements were transversal and shared elements. However, two units of analysis distinguished our cases.

3.2. A distinction between two main units of analysis: prayer and symbols

Prayer in the workplace. Praying at work is not, in secularized French society, an act that "goes without saying." For many, it is a matter of luck—that is to say, a benefit for employees who are members of an organization that allows them to do so. For those who pray in a structure that does not clearly allow them to do so or who have not taken a position on the issue, it constitutes an impassable horizon: "*For me, being able to pray at work was part of my pay, you don't realize, it's a crazy thing to be so free, so maybe you can earn more somewhere else, but you get paid the same if you count that*" (39).

Some took the initiative to pray in surprising places, which could push their managers to stop the prayer; this was sometimes accompanied by a search for a future solution: *"We had a guy who was praying in the parking lot, and the diversity director said that beyond security, it's also the person, it's not great for him. A parking lot is dirty, black, and wet sometimes, so that's why it's not great for your self-image"* (5). Moreover, concealed prayer made without the agreement of the person in charge seemed problematic. Some believers refused to lie to their leader: *"I don't want to lie, I need to work with confidence, I can't smile at someone and do something they don't want to do behind their back, especially if they're my boss, it's easier to say what you want and not come back"* (37).

When this form of REW was presented to teams and colleagues and discussed, it seemed to be accepted by the teams and did not generate internal dysfunction. Some, however, expressed fears about their colleagues' reactions and did not dare to pray at work, even though they prayed at home. These elements highlight a climate against religious expression, one of mistrust and even tension, especially when it comes to prayer. If prayer is divisive, it is also because it requires accommodations. On the sites of ALIMENTARUS, it seemed difficult to find such arrangements: "*It depends; our premises are sometimes under the eye of the client so it can be detrimental too, it depends on the context, but anyway, I don't know the rules in each context"* (3).

In the public sector, employees found marginal accommodations linked mainly to their autonomy and proximity to their homes or a place of worship. When allowed, this solution seemed satisfactory, and they were careful not to interfere with what they perceived to be the requirements of neutrality. These situations of concealment, or feelings of suspicion, seemed to exist due to the internal climate within organizations. Some individuals pointed out the difficulty of their managers or their own difficulty in keeping this subject at a distance because it was about their deep identity.

In the public sector, the neutrality of civil servants needs to be kept intact, and for this reason, it was important to go back to the very principle of the republic. When this does not occur, it raises the possibility of a concealed act that could once again generate tension due to a lack of trust. Another COLLECTISTE agent made the comparison of catching a colleague on his break time doing his shopping. Our cross-checking of information confirmed this situation, for which the officer in question had been repeatedly reminded of the rule that break times took place at the community's premises (cf. internal rules): *"I may not be allowed to go there [to the mosque] on my break, although it's rare, but when I see others going to the market for 25 minutes for the break, what difference does it make?"* (19).

When explicitly authorized, the practice of prayer should also be based on rules, formal or informal, to control time spent. This is further reinforced in the context of irregular activity during the day (as is the case in restaurants) or when all team members have the same religion. However, it seems that a natural regulation takes place in the allotted time when the team does not include employees of several religions; because this authorization is perceived as a rare opportunity, individuals seem to take advantage of it in a reasonable manner. Finally, for COLLECTISTE, individuals also made comparisons between the units of analysis, particularly of different types of symbols (i.e., veils and crosses). Very concretely, some believed that neutrality was negotiable in certain services for wearing a religious sign: "*When I see services in the town hall where there*

are crosses, and there are big rumors about prayer, when the crosses are very real and visible, it can make me smile a little bit" (26).

This analysis unit is a divide between regulation postures. For COLLECTIST, prayer was the subject of a unanimous positioning of prohibition. All individuals indicated that this action should not be contemplated within their organization. However, interviewees mainly insisted on the need to better explain the grounds and goal of the requirement of neutrality. Their asking for justification of this prohibition in its finality, *i.e.* the equality of citizens facing the public service and its agents.

Believers, for their part, made a comparison with other break times taken outside of work and evoked places of worship, more specifically the possibility of going there in work time (a mosque and church were located less than five minutes away on foot). For ALIMENTARUS, the situation was even more complex. There was no corporate positioning on this subject, and the respondents were unaware of the rules in place.

Wearing a religious sign. The need for communication appeared systematically in organizations that did not allow employees to wear a veil. However, a need to communicate does not necessarily lead to systematic and unconditional authorization afterwards, and the posture of the organization regarding veils was sometimes unclear:

> *So, for example, once she was asked to take off the veil, for a training session; the HR department asks her to take it off, and then next door she can meet Fadwa [a colleague] on her way out who accompanies a group or who talks to her agents with a headscarf. That's nonsense.* (19)

At COLLECTISTE, there was indecision around the application of strict neutrality.

Belonging to an international group was also very important in the case of ALIMENTARUS, because certain outfits existed in the outfit catalog, such as veils. When it came to enforcing criteria such as health and safety, some restrictions seemed to be accepted.

> *In the ALIMENTARUS catalog of professional outfits—it is an international catalog of course—there are covering outfits, including ALIMENTARUS veils, so it is necessary to be coherent with the world policy of the group as well*. (01)

This created a desire to position the company through regulations, such as at ALIMENTARUS, by including legal criteria in the internal regulations, making authorization the standard, and specifying the criteria for prohibition.

A link made between the veil and the "corporate image" was criticized by believers because the posture about it was not clear. Some argued that it did not exist, and it had yet to be proven or studied. Others in OPENISLA confirmed this link, but perceived it in a positive way. The veil, contrary to the cross, was perceived as a flag of a way of thinking. Therefore, it was seen as a tool to promote the policy of inclusion for ALIMENTARUS, an element of contestation and noncompliance with the law for COLLECTOR, and a bearer of the openness of the organizations or even their degree of adherence to a corpus of values or beliefs for EMANCE and OPENISLA.

Table III summarizes the perceptions of the postures. For each of the forms of REW, between details on the reasons for refusal or authorization are included in parentheses, or the reasons given when the principle is circumvented, e.g., the Alimentarus's position on absences was to authorize requests, but when this interfered with the functioning of the service, managers could be led to refuse the request.

Forms of REW	*ALIMENTARUS*	*COLLECTISTE*	*EMANCE*	*OPENISLA*
Absence requests	Permission (unless it affects functioning)	Permission (unless it affects functioning)	Permission (unless it affects functioning)	Permission (unless it affects functioning)
Arrangement of time for fasting	Permission (unless it affects functioning)	Permission (unless it affects functioning)	Permission (unless it affects functioning)	Permission (because all employees officially observe *Ramadan*)
Religious symbols	***Permission but not systematic application*** (because some department heads think that the duty of neutrality applies to private employees)	***Prohibition but not systematic application*** (because some department heads circumvent the official position, because they believe, for example, that to wear a sign does not prevent one from being neutral)	Permission (because religious practice is a counterpart of the time of *disputatio*)	Permission (because this company wants to be a safe space for Muslim practitioners)
Prayer in the workplace	***Unclear posture*** (diverse motives: authorization; secularism, respect, tolerance; for prohibition: duty of neutrality, personal conviction, space constraints)	***Prohibition but not systematic application*** (because some department heads circumvent the official posture, as they feel it prevents agents from being neutral)	Permission (because religious practice is a counterpart of the time of *disputatio*)	Permission (because this company wants to be a safe space for Muslim practitioners)
Proselytism	**Prohibition** (prohibited by law)	**Prohibition** (neutrality)	***Part of the posture*** (it is normal in this company to try to convince one's colleague, especially during times of *disputatio*)	***Not relevant*** (due to a 100% Muslim team)
Refusal to perform a task	**Prohibition** (job requirements)	Interdiction (job requirements and neutrality)	**Prohibition** (job requirements)	***Not relevant*** (because this is a religious business, so no task is contrary to the precepts of Islam)
Refusal to work with a person of the opposite sex	**Prohibition** (gender equality at work)	**Prohibition** (gender equality at work)	**Prohibition** (gender equality at work)	**Prohibition** (not theologically justified)

Table V: Synthesis of posture perceptions

The gap between the official posture and the one that managers applied at the operational level was therefore significant for two particular forms of REW: wearing a religious sign and praying during break time. These are two forms of REW that call for behaviors that respect two specific conditions:

- The corporal or vestimentary exteriorization of faith (which corresponds to behaviors traditionally reserved for the personal sphere in France); and
- The observability in the workplace (i.e., in the work situation or in the break room), as opposed to absence requests, which are traditional requests and by definition cause an absence, not the presence of a new phenomenon in the workplace

This difficulty in aligning the official posture with the operational posture applied by managers seemed to be influenced by the following elements:

- The ambiguous or inaudible positioning of diversity leaders (sometimes inaudible for ALIMENTARUS because it was supported only by the diversity department; ambiguous or perceived as such for COLLECTISTE due to the political positioning of elected officials blurring the legal obligation of neutrality);
- The absence of a formal position on the issue by the organizations (e.g., internal rules or charters); the people interviewed asked for this formal position, either to support their decisions, or to understand or relay where the ban or authorization came from;
- The lack of awareness or training of operational teams and their management on this particular issue, and in particular the difficulty of managers to present an argument;
- Spatial spread (the two organizations were multi-site, one in a globalized geographical area and the other in a territorial area limited to a few square kilometers);

- Non-uniformity of spaces (e.g., the premises were those of the clients for ALIMENTARUS, which made organizational flexibility more complex); and

- The need for an externally based argument (e.g., customer opinion or equality of citizens in the face of the public service) that was difficult for some managers to build and defend.

Finally, the legal context and its clarity influenced situations less than the way organizations used and enforced it. In the last section, we propose four ideals adapted from our study that provide insight into the alignment or lack of alignment of postures.

3.3. A proposal of four ideal types of REW management

In this last section, we propose four ideal types of REW regulation in French organizations. This is not a question of designing ideal models in the sense that they would be utopias. Through synthesis and abstraction, we propose that four ideals emerge from the results based on our four cases. We justify each element selected to construct the typology. The justification is both theoretical and empirical.

- The (mis-)alignment between official posture and observed postures at the operational level.

- The applicable standard, mainly from the law, because the French context is specific (as presented in Table 1), and therefore implies a contextualized knowledge of the law by employees, their managers, and executives, depending on whether they work for a private or public company (Galindo and Zannad, 2015; Hennekam *et al.*, 2020; Honoré *et al.*, 2019).

- The conceivable size of the ideal typical structure, because certain functions seem less conducive to generalization or implementation in structures that are too large. For example, the use of *disputatio* to confront religious opinions is better suited to small

organizations because it requires strong support from the leader and close relationships between employees (Gaillard and Jolivet, 2019), whereas organizations of all sizes can work toward inclusion using more traditional tools (Cintas *et al.*, 2020).

- The Galindo and Zannad (2015) posture typology: acceptance, denial, compromise. For this typology, we observed at least two attitudes at the operational level.

- The Hennekam *et al.* (2018) manager's strategies typology: flexibility within the rules, separation, common ground. For this typology, we observed at least two attitudes at the operational level.

- Religious affiliations of the employees, because the composition of the workforce impacts the regulation of REW, especially the density of REW.

- The tools mobilized (whether guides, guidelines, or other tools). In some cases, we had to return to the literature to broaden the scope of our typology. For example, in the case of Private Type, the company we selected did not have an REW guide, but some large companies do.

- The attitude toward REW (i.e., temporality), because it is a criterion that differentiates our cases. Indeed, ALIMENTARUS and COLLECTISTE leaders chose to work on REW management after having been confronted with it. The other companies had tools before they encountered the phenomenon (driven by their leaders for the other two).

- The finality of the ideal type, because religious expression gives meaning to employees' activities (Benefiel *et al.*, 2014; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004), calls on leaders and diversity departments to consider the meaning—i.e., the finality—of postures, in order to arm managers who also need meaning to justify their actions with regard to REW.

- The REW policy, by synthesis of the interviews with people in charge of defining the posture in each of the organizations, and as an extension of the literature on REW.

	NON-ALIGNED TYPES		ALIGNED TYPES	
Type	**INCLUSIVE TYPE**	**INVIZIBILIZATION TYPE**	**CONFRONTATION TYPE**	**MISSION TYPE**
Source case	ALIMENTARUS	COLLECTISTE	EMANCE	OPENISLA
Norm by law	Freedom	Neutrality	Freedom	Freedom
Workforce religious affiliations	Pluralism	Pluralism	Pluralism	Only one religion
Galindo and Zannad (2015) official postures typology	Acceptance	Denial/neutrality	Compromise	Acceptance
Hennekam *et al.* (2018) manager's strategies typology observed	Separation Flexibility within the rules Common ground	Separation Flexibility within the rules	Common ground	Common ground
Tools needed	Internal rules Guides Training	Law of 1905 Charters Training	Cohesion room *Disputatio*	Prayer room
Attitude to the REW	Reaction	Reaction	Anticipation	Anticipation
Official purpose	Inclusion	Equality	Emancipation	Protection
Official finality	Opening	Invisibilization	Utilization	Facilitation for a minority

Table VI: Presentation of ideal typical *postures*

4. Discussion

4.1. Answers to research questions

The current research described four ideal types that provide an answer to our first research question (RQ1): the inclusive type, the invisibilization type, the compromise type, and the mission type. Contrary to previous work on postures (Galindo and Zannad, 2015), we deal with the perceptions of these postures beyond managerial discourse. The displayed posture sometimes differed strongly from the perceived posture. Thus, we distinguished between aligned and non-aligned postures. In the former, the official posture is inaudible or unclear because the model defended by the leaders is not known or is perceived as contradicted by other political commitments. The size and spread effects also contribute to the gap. Also, we introduced two new postures—confrontation and mission types—and for the first time, the comparison was extended to organizations belonging to the public sector, which made it possible to nuance the effect of the law, and to give more importance to its appropriation by organizations.

Our second research question (RQ2) aimed to determine the forms of REW that distinguished postures. More specifically, in non-aligned postures, two units of analysis clearly distinguished our cases: wearing a religious sign and praying at work. Within the same organization, we observed diverse managerial strategies (Hennekam *et al.*, 2020), particularly concerning these two units of analysis. A more assertive and specific positioning of these two forms of REW was expected for the organizations concerned (ALIMENTARUS and COLLECTISTE). When the posture was not aligned, managers sometimes positioned themselves individually and without considering the law.

Refusal to execute a task and to work with a person of the same sex were systematically perceived as prohibited. Requests for absences for religious holidays and time adjustments in the context of fasting were mostly allowed. Transgressive forms (OFRE, 2020) and traditional forms were

banalized, while the more emerging forms (i.e., prayer, and the wearing of a visible religious sign), specifically highly ritualized prayers or an ostentatious symbol, were not.

In addition, this work enabled the identification of the following factors that influenced the alignment of official and operational postures (RQ3): the form of REW (if it was a ritualized exteriorization of faith visible in the workplace or not), the religion involved and its minority or non-minority status in the country (in France, Islam seems specific), the degree of clarity of the official posture, the degree of formalization of the official posture (as mentioned by Galindo and Oiry, 2021), the size and spread of the firm, the degree of awareness of managers and their teams, the degree of involvement of leaders in the definition and implementation of the posture, and the finality of the official posture.

4.2. Research contributions

The present research is a case study that includes a public organization, an affinity organization, a private organization, and an organization with an innovative regulatory posture. This diversity of cases constitutes a strength of the study, particularly because it brought together individuals with multiple statuses and varied experiences, responding to a call to understand the subject of REW in different types of companies, particularly SMEs (Galindo and Zannad, 2015). It confirms the work of Honoré (2020), who proposed that some organizations could consider something religiously deviant, while others, it was normalized. For example, a large private company may position itself in a posture of acceptance (Galindo and Zannad, 2015), but this posture may be difficult to operationalize.

In the case of prayer, organizational flexibility allowed some individuals to pray in external, prayer-friendly places during breaks, confirming recent work by Cintas *et al.* (2020). However, because this flexibility was appreciated by local managers, it could sometimes create different accommodations within the same organization and different or even contradictory rules, and blur the perceived posture. Despite a clear and known law, inequalities in applying this posture of

religious symbols persisted between services and between symbols, becoming a sort of local managerial jurisprudence.

This research provides a sensitive understanding of religious expression at work, and shows that the alignment is to be sought specifically for each form of REW. It confirms the work conducted by Galindo and Surply (2010), following the work of Reynaud on social regulation (1979). Indeed, in Cases 1 and 2, the control rule (i.e., official posture) was transformed by the regulation process. If the control rule was not clearly expressed, it led to adaptation during friction with the autonomous rules, which could be very different from one service to another, and from one department to the next. In some cases, the autonomous rule took precedence over the control rule, and led to a different posture than the one desired by top management.

4.3. Managerial and practical implications

One transversal managerial recommendation was to take a stance that was both clear and shared at all levels of the organization. To do so, the posture must be based on the law, be applied consistently within (regulations linked to religion) and outside (regulations linked to other managerial situations) the company, and be inscribed in a global vision of diversity. The religious fact should neither generate a passkey nor constitute grounds for discrimination.

The contextualization of postures is strong, and the universal transposition of rules from one organization to another is complex. Each organization had its own standards, religious affiliations of teams, diversity policies, and purpose of posture. Taking into account the situational dimension of REW—its context—is therefore decisive. The current study largely describes the challenge of constructing regulatory postures for organizations that, to date, have not yet made this choice. They must take a stand, create tools, and affirm their model at the risk of creating inequalities. Knowledge of the law does not presuppose comfort in applying the law; therefore, it is advisable to make this rule known in the organization and transpose it through tools and a coherent discourse.

We can therefore summarize the results by distinguishing four main needs expressed by the respondents, which are important managerial recommendations for reducing the gap between the official posture and the operational posture:

- Guarantee clarity of the official posture and ensure that it will be defended by the leaders. This can be carried out by a diversity department or by an HRD.
- Give meaning to one's posture by raising awareness among the intermediate hierarchical line; making the French model of *Laïcité* understood and presenting French religious pluralism is important for private and public companies.
- Obtain the applicable legal framework and transpose it to the local level (e.g., with internal rules for private organizations, and the Charter of *Laïcité* in public services for public institutions).
- For the two forms of REW that are the most difficult to manage, analyze the spatial constraints on all sites, propose solutions or restrictions for private enterprise, and extend awareness to non-managerial public agents in order to position neutrality in public action and in the duties of civil servants, because it is also a lever for creating meaning.

4.4. Limitations and future research

There are some limitations to the current work, and they indicate many avenues for future research. The present study does not reflect the density (OFRE, 2020) that organizations are faced with as a result of their posture choice or lack thereof. Density takes into account how REW affects work situations. Thus, studying how density challenges the control rule when it is known to all is a recommended direction for future research. It would also be interesting to study organizations that use internal regulations to regulate REW and the role of this new management tool used by French organizations. The current study also opens the way for specific case studies

on the impact of REW on team cohesion or climate, for example, through the prism of theories of organizational justice (Hennekam *et al.*, 2018).

Studies on certain forms of REW appear necessary, in particular those that present positioning difficulties for managers and that make the difference between two postures: religious symbols (e.g., veils; Chenigle *et al.*, 2020) and prayer. Finally, we could more specifically consider the proximity of the manager within organizations by considering the latter as "quasi-jurisdictional" structures (Laufer, 2018), within which managers must constantly position themselves on new, polyform, and polysemic facts (Honoré, 2020), hence creating managerial jurisprudence to anchor the posture of their organization. This is another way to study the consequences of an official posture that is not aligned at the operational level, and another way to distinguish between words and deeds.

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Appendix 1 : *Sample*

i	First name	Organization/Sector	Position	Duration	Religious beliefs
1	François	ALIMENTARUS B2B Catering	Director of Diversity	01h30	Atheist
2	Jean-Luc		Operational HRD	01h20	Atheist
3	Amira		Operational HR Manager	00h45	Muslim
4	Caroline		Household Team Coordinator	00h30	Atheist
5	Milan		Regional Director	00h30	Catholic
6	Odille		Human Resources Manager	00h53	Catholic
7	Philippe		Regional Director	00h31	Catholic
8	Sabrina		Diversity Officer	00h54	Muslim
9	Jean-Marie		Regional Director	00h55	Catholic
10	Zoulika		Administrative Assistant	00h38	Muslim
11	Samir		Catering Agent	00h28	Muslim
12	Ibra		Dishwasher	00h35	Muslim
13	Salomé		Catering Agent	00h39	Juive
14	Thomas	COLLECTISTE Public sector	Mayor	00h50	Atheist
15	Patrick		Director of Technical Services	00h40	Atheist
16	Chritiane		HRD	00h54	Atheist
17	Valérie		Assistant HR Director	00h43	Atheist
18	Jules		Catering Director	00h36	Atheist
19	Imran		Technical Services Officer	00h42	Muslim
20	Tina		Director of Childhood Education	01h04	Atheist
21	Marie-Claude		Head of Early Childhood	00h32	Atheist
22	Kadia		Early Childhood Officer	00h31	Muslim
23	Sébastien		Managing Director	00h59	Atheist
24	Joëlle		Payroll Technician	00h29	Catholic
25	Wila		School Officer	00h38	Muslim
26	Brahim		IT Agent	00h53	Muslim
27	Kader		Head of Youth Services	00h41	Muslim
28	Marc	EMANCE Computer services	Company Manager	02h10	Atheist
29	Sabri		Development Engineer	00h42	Muslim
30	Thomas		Database Administrator	00h48	Atheist
31	Julien		Analyst	00h57	Atheist
32	Anna		Office Manager	01h12	Atheist
33	François		Database Administrator	00h46	Catholic
34	Steeven		Analysis Manager	00h41	Atheist
35	Maria		Webdesigner (apprentice)	01h02	Catholic
36	Naïm	OPENILSA Wholesale food trade	Company Manager	00h57	Muslims
37	Samira		CEO	00h32	
38	Ikram		Communication Officer	00h21	
39	Marwan		Former Intern in Logistics	00h39	
40	Abdou		Ex-employee Logistics	00h46	