Original Article

When does spiritual intelligence particularly predict job engagement? The mediating role of psychological empowerment

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ABSTRACT

Background: Regarding the importance of health care providers such as nurses who are always in stressful environments, it is imperative to better understand how they become more engaged in their work. The purpose of this paper is to focus on health care providers (nurses), and examine how the interaction between spiritual intelligence and psychological empowerment affect job engagement.

Materials and Methods: This descriptive and quantitative study was conducted among nurses at the Faghihi Hospital in Shiraz, Iran in 2010. A sample of nurses (*n* = 179) completed standard survey questionnaire including spiritual intelligence, psychological empowerment, and job engagement which included 5 questions for each dimensions. For testing the hypotheses of the study, results were analyzed through structural equation modeling (SEM) using LISREL 8.8.

Results: SEM revealed that psychological empowerment could fully mediate the relationship between spiritual intelligence and job engagement. However, the correlation between spiritual intelligence and job engagement was significant but weak using Pearson coefficient method. This can imply that psychological empowerment plays a crucial role in the relationship between spiritual intelligence and job engagement.

Conclusions: This paper indicates that spiritual intelligence might affect different organizational parameters, directly or indirectly. Therefore, it is recommended that the researchers evaluate probable relationships between spiritual intelligence and other variables.

Key words: Iran, job engagement, psychological empowerment, spiritual intelligence

INTRODUCTION

Hospitals and nurses play a crucial role in facilitating the development of health and solving health problems. Nurses as one of the health care providers, in order for being able to provide desirable services, should attentively be considered by the administration. However, in fact, nurses get depressed over time because of lack of cheerful environment and tiredness. In a new, modern, and more productive organization, employees have reported feelings of being isolated, devalued, dehumanized, and exploited.[1] Because of the open atmosphere of the hospital environment, high expectations of the patients and their relatives, high frequency of interpersonal conflict, and inappropriate behaviors of patients and their relatives, nurses more often experience stressful time at work. Moreover, Hospitals report low levels of nurses' job satisfaction and their commitment when they work in unsupportive circumstances as a result of disempowering conditions such as negative attitude of patients.

As a result of the problems mentioned above, a large number of studies have recently been performed in the

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context of hospitals considering the indisputable impact of job engagement on employee outcomes, organizational success, and financial performance.[2] Some others have been conducted on the consequences of spiritual intelligence. Previous studies have proposed that spiritual beliefs, practices, and commitments appear to be linked with positive results such as psychological and physical health (well-being); marital satisfaction and stability; positive interpersonal functioning; and improved quality of life.[3] Shankar Pawar indicated that workplace spirituality is positively associated, to a considerable extent, with work attitudes of employees such as job satisfaction and job engagement.[4] Issa and pick in their study showed that people who work in the Australian services sector tend to consider themselves "spiritual," that is not necessarily religious, might more likely be derived from aesthetics.[5] There is still ambiguity between the terms spirituality and religion.[6] Spirituality is an awareness of life which enables us to think about life, who we are, and where we come from.[7] Spirituality is characterized by the experience of the individual, however, religion is characterized as formal and organized associated with rituals and belief.[8]

It seems that the image of spirituality is very different in our minds as a Muslim. In our beliefs, spirituality is closely related to religion. In the context of religion, "spirituality," is not just a mental matter, imagination or human feelings, but a feeling that arises from beyond the material world. In modern spirituality, the "truth" is not an issue and any emotional experience can be taken into account as spirituality.[9]

The findings make one wonder about the underlying mechanisms through which spirituality might act. These facts imply that there might be a significant mediation mechanism at play in the relationship between spiritual intelligence and job engagement. The current paper contributes to the research by investigating the effects of spiritual intelligence on job engagement, and seeks to offer new theoretical and empirical insights into the concept. This study may contribute to a better understanding of the spiritual intelligence profile of nurses at Iranian hospitals.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a descriptive and quantitative research aimed at investigation of the hypothesized mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between spiritual intelligence and job engagement. The hypotheses of the study as shown in Figure 1 are listed below:
- H1—There is a significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and psychological empowerment
- H2—There is a significant relationship between psychological empowerment and job engagement

- H3—There is a significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and job engagement.

The abovementioned hypotheses were tested through a survey at the Faghihi Hospital during 2009–2010. This hospital was ranked the first among all hospitals in Shiraz.[10] First, all 300 nurses were asked to participate in the survey and complete the questionnaire in person. Eventually, 179 completed questionnaires were returned which is considered suitable for the sampling process. Ninety percent of the respondents were females. Approximately 25% had more than 6 years of work experience, 26% had less than 1 year, and the rest had worked at the hospital for 1–6 years.

All nurses were informed about the purpose and design of this research. After obtaining signed written informed consents, in order to collect data, three types of standard questionnaires were used: (1) Job engagement (JE) questionnaire designed by Alan M. Saks. (2006).[2] (2) Spiritual intelligence (SI) questionnaire designed by Linda Hildebrant (2011), which contains four dimensions:[11] critical existential thinking (CET), personal meaning production (PMP), transcendental awareness (TA), and conscious state expansion (CSE). (3) Psychological empowerment (PE) questionnaire designed by Zoe Dimitriades (2007), which contains three dimensions:[12] goal internalization (GI), perceived control (PCON), and perceived competence (PCOM). These standard questionnaires were thoroughly studied and translated to Farsi in a way that the respondents could easily understand and complete it.

Nonetheless, all the questionnaires were standard; the reliability of all variables was checked using Cronbach's method in a pilot study of approximately 30 respondents, resulting in a total alpha of more than 0.90 that evidently reveals that the measures are internally consistent and therefore fully reliable for the study.

In the preliminary analysis, one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov (KS) and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) method were employed. The results of these two tests showed that the data collected from the different layers and groups of the sample are suitable for further analyses of the study. Because correlation was employed as a statistical tool in this study, the Pearson coefficient was used to check the relations between variables [Table 1]. In addition, structural equation modeling (SEM) using Lisrel Software version 8.8 for windows by Karl Jöreskog and Dag Sörbom, Copyright © 2005-2016, Scientific Software International, Inc. was performed to test the hypotheses of the study.

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation and correlations between scales

Scales	M	SD	CET	PMP	TA	CSE	PCOM	GI	PCON	SI	PE	JE
CET	3.99	0.48	-									
PMP	3.88	0.60	0.58**	-								
TA	3.76	0.52	0.59**	0.56**	-							
CSE	3.81	0.57	0.76**	0.69**	0.57**	-						
PCOM	4.14	0.56	0.40**	0.38**	0.38**	0.46**	-					
GI	3.70	0.86	0.30**	0.44**	0.18*	0.43**	0.38**	-				
PCON	3.72	0.75	0.36**	0.42**	0.28**	0.43**	0.46**	0.56**	-			
SI	3.86	0.46	0.85**	0.85**	0.80**	0.89**	0.48**	0.41**	0.44**	-		
PE	3.85	0.58	0.43**	0.52**	0.33**	0.54**	0.69**	0.84**	0.85**	0.54**	-	
JE	3.83	0.67	0.27**	0.31**	0.16*	0.25**	0.48**	0.31**	0.17*	0.29**	0.38**	-

*Significant at 0.05 level, **Significant at 0.01 level, CET: Critical Existential Thinking, PMP: Personal Meaning Production, TA: Transcendental Awareness, CSE: Conscious State Expansion, PCOM: Perceived Competency, GI: Goal Internalization, PCON: Perceived Control, SI: Spiritual Intelligence, PE: Psychological Empowerment, JE: Job Engagement

Ethical considerations

This research project was approved by the local ethics committee of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences and written informed consents were obtained from all the participants.

RESULTS

The findings of this study showed the following.

Preliminary analysis

Table 1 shows the scales, means, standard deviations (SD), and intercorrelations of all variables of the study. According to the intercorrelations shown in Table 1, the hypothesized mediating role of PE in the relationship between SI and JE was proven significant. Moreover, the Pearson coefficient method revealed weak intercorrelations among spiritual intelligence and its dimensions with job engagement.

Testing the hypotheses

In the first model (M1), we tested a full-mediation model using LISREL. In this model, we included a path from spiritual intelligence to psychological empowerment as well as another path from psychological empowerment to job engagement. In the next step, in order to control the mediation process in the model, we added a path directly between spiritual intelligence and job engagement to explore whether partial mediation was at play; thus, model 2 was established. According to model 1 [Figure 2] and model 2 [Figure 3], hypotheses H1 and H2 were confirmed whereas H3 was not proven to be significant. It implies that psychological empowerment could successfully mediate the relationship between spiritual intelligence and job engagement. In addition, the direct link between spiritual intelligence and job engagement was not found to be significant (t-value $= -0.01$). Both the models tested revealed suitable goodness of fit indices, as shown in Table 2.
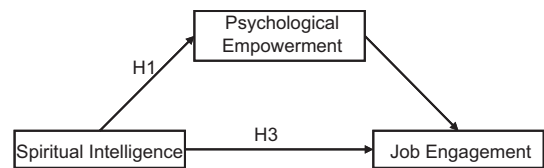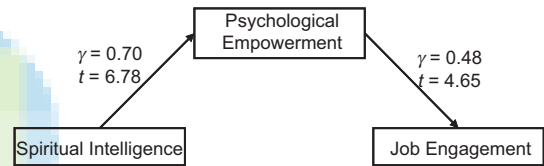

Figure 1: The Conceptual Model
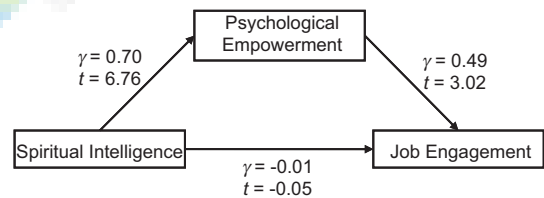

Figure 2: Full mediation model (M1)

Figure 3: Partial mediation model (M2)

DISCUSSION

This study was the first to call into question the way job engagement has been affected by spiritual intelligence as well as the mediating role of psychological empowerment. This paper examined how the interaction between spiritual intelligence and psychological empowerment affect job engagement.

Regarding the following discussion, the present study attempted to form hypotheses and test the relationship between spiritual intelligence and psychological empowerment. Thomas and Velthouse, defined psychological empowerment as a cognitive state that can be seen in the following four

Table 2: Fit measures of the models

Models	χ^2/df	RMSEA	NFI	NNFI	GFI	AGFI	CFI	IFI
M1	2.925	0.099	0.89	0.91	0.88	0.82	0.93	0.93
M2	2.982	0.10	0.89	0.90	0.88	0.82	0.93	0.93

RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, NFI: Normed Fit Index, NNFI: Non-normed Fit Index, GFI: Goodness of Fit, AGFI: Adjusted Goodness of Fit, CFI: Comparative Fit Index, IFI: Incremental Fit Index

dimensions: Meaning (value of person's work), competence (the person's ability to do work), self-determination (the right to choose the activities), and impact (the ability to influence organization's outcomes).[13] Ergeneli et al. showed that there are two approaches toward empowerment in theory and practice.[14] The first approach is called the relational approach that focuses on environmental factors and defines empowerment as a set of managerial activities that gives the staff power, control, and authority. From this point of view, empowerment is known to be a collaboration by which power is transferred from the organization to those who have less power. The second approach is called the cognitive or motivational approach to understand the perspective of the employees. In this approach, employees' psychological empowerment is emphasized by reflecting on the fact that whether employees see themselves as a person who has power or not. Based on this approach, empowerment is staff's mental condition. The cognitive approach emphasizes on open communication and emotional support aimed at reducing stress. This approach is consistent with spiritual intelligence. Because spiritual intelligence is the variable by which a person can gain higher range of self-awareness, pleasure, satisfaction, and control over life, one might employ this type of intelligence in order to reshape, redefine, or even re-establish the spiritual part of his or her life.

The second hypothesis suggested a possible relationship between psychological empowerment and job engagement. Employee engagement has been defined in many different ways, and the definitions and measures often sound like other better known and established constructs such as organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior.[2] Previous studies hypothesized the worker's perceptions of psychological empowerment to be an important influence on employees and even organizational outcomes such as job engagement. Kahn defined personal engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances."[15] Rothbard also defined engagement as psychological presence but went further to state that it involves two critical components, namely, attention and absorption. Attention refers to "cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about a role" whereas absorption "means being engrossed in a role and refers to the intensity of one's focus on a role."[16] Bhatnagar

concluded that psychologically empowered workers contribute to organizational commitment.[17] Hochwalder sampled 838 registered nurses and 518 assistant nurses in Sweden and found that psychological empowerment was inversely related to emotional exhaustion.[18] Carina et al. reported that empowerment can increase organizational commitment and job satisfaction.[19]

Finally, the last hypothesis examined relationship between spiritual intelligence and job engagement.

Job engagement and spiritual intelligence are important concepts to consider when dealing with changes at work and improving performance.[20,21] Since the beginnings of human civilization, nursing, more than medicine or other allied health care professionals, has been a vital force in integrating holistic health concepts with traditional medicine; nursing often maintains holism, a state of harmony between the body, mind, and spirit and functions within that ever-changing environment.[22] For the first time, Gardner treated spirituality as a form of intelligence. He defined intelligence as "the ability to solve problems, or to fashion products, that are valued in one or more cultural or community settings."[21] Four dimensions of spiritual intelligence are critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion. Critical existential thinking is the ability to create meaning based on deep understanding of existential questions. Personal meaning production is a person's ability to stimulate both physical and psychological experience of the person with personal meaning that comes with a sense of satisfaction.[11] Transcendental awareness is the ability to understand one's relationship with a higher power, all the creatures, man, and the environment.[23,24] And eventually, conscious state expansion is the ability to enter a state of spiritual awareness or higher.[23]

Previous studies have identified the benefits of spiritual intelligence. For instance, Badrinarayan indicated that workplace spirituality is positively associated, to a considerable extent, with work attitudes of employees such as job satisfaction and job engagement.[4] Bagheri et al. indicated that there is a significant relationship between the spiritual intelligence and happiness.[8]

Spiritual intelligence might have a positive influence on job engagement because it has long been known that spiritual practices such as yoga, meditation, and prayer are important to the mind, body, and spirit of the individual.[25] Therefore, it is not surprising that engagement is considered as a mental process which is related to spiritual intelligence.

As with all empirical research, the limitation of the present study should be addressed. One notable limitation of this

study was the small number of respondents (179) from one particular hospital. The small sample size (low statistical power) limited the ability to generalize the findings of the present study.

CONCLUSIONS

The results clearly depict that psychological empowerment fully mediates the relationship between spiritual intelligence and job engagement. However, the correlation between spiritual intelligence and job engagement was significant but weak using Pearson coefficient method, the structural equation modelling proved no significant cause and effect relationship between the two variables. This can imply that psychological empowerment plays a crucially important role in the relationship between spiritual intelligence and job engagement, i.e., according to the models tested in the study, spiritual intelligence is positively related to job engagement indirectly. The indirect link between spiritual intelligence and job engagement is mediated by psychological empowerment, and this is the governing relationship between dependent and independent variables in the conceptual model of the paper. In conformity with previous studies, this paper reiterates the importance of psychological empowerment in enhancing various organizational parameters in the context of health care providers. Consequently, it is recommended that administrators of health centres and hospitals take empowerment practically into consideration. In addition to the abovementioned, spiritual intelligence should be more attentively scrutinized by researchers. This paper inspires that spiritual intelligence might affect different organizational parameters, directly or indirectly. Therefore, it is recommended to the researchers that they evaluate probable relationships between spiritual intelligence and other variables, while considering not only the role of psychological empowerment but also the mediating role of other psychologically oriented variables in order to fully conceptualize the outcomes of this effective and newly attractive parameter. Finally, it is also recommended to human resource practitioners, especially in health centers and hospitals, that they reconstruct the process of nurse recruitment by considering the valuable nature of spiritual intelligence.

Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

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