Development and outcome of workplace spirituality: An empirical study in Thailand

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Article Info

Abstract

The main objectives of this research are to examine effects of workplace spirituality development program and cross-lagged causal relationships between workplace spirituality and the selected variables, including psychological capital, spiritual health, authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being of executives in private organizations. Data were collected from 71 executives in one private organization in Thailand selected via purposive sampling. *T*-test for dependent samples was performed to compare pre- and post-test means of the study variables. Also, path analysis was performed to examine the cross-lagged causal relationships. Results showed that post-test means of workplace spirituality, psychological capital, spiritual health, authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being were higher than the pre-test means ($p < .05$). In addition, workplace spirituality was found to have significant direct and indirect effects on all dependent variables (i.e., authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being).

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Introduction

These days, organizational psychology has placed importance on employee development, specifically on groups of executives who are key players in achieving organizational goals which differ across organizations. The current study examines one organization whose one goal is to "provide humanistic care". This goal is included in the organization's core values, indicating that it is crucial to develop approaches to accomplish such goal.

According to related literature, multiple organizational factors have been found to contribute greatly to organizational outcomes. Workplace spirituality introduced by Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) is one of these important factors. The authors defined workplace spirituality as a conceptual framework of organizational value reflecting the culture that fosters individual experiences through the work process promoting awareness of interpersonal relationships within the circumstances providing employees feeling of completeness and satisfaction. Also, related studies found that workplace spirituality had an impact on employees' psychological well-being (Mckee et al., 2011), supervisors' leadership,

job satisfaction, and employee engagement (Chongvisal, 2012; Chongvisal & Supparerkchaisakul, 2017). Apart from organizational factors, one individual-level factor enabling organizations to achieve their goals is authentic leadership. Also, it was found that workplace spirituality had an impact on authentic leadership; in the meantime, authentic leadership was found to be associated with psychological well-being (Arnold et al., 2007) as well as have impacts on followers' happiness and well-being (Northouse, 2016). It was also found that authentic leadership had positive impacts on job satisfaction and performance (Wong & Laschinger, 2012) and mediated the positive relationships between flexibility-oriented organizational culture and employees' job satisfaction (Azanza et al., 2013). Moreover, spiritual health was found to be an important individual-level factor, a person with spiritual health would have psychological well-being, which eventually affected work performance positively. It was found that spirituality or spiritual health directly affected competency and indirectly affected work and employee engagement (Chongvisal & Supparerkchaisakul, 2017). Moreover, studies on psychological capital have been conducted recently. The results showed that psychological capital was associated with employee performance and satisfaction (Luthans et al., 2007) and affected authentic leadership (Jensen & Luthans, 2006). Another key individual-level factor is job satisfaction; employees who felt satisfied with their jobs would positively influence their organizations through work performance and organizational effectiveness (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

Moreover, the program entitled "The Development of Spiritual Health and Workplace Spirituality" (henceforth, the program) developed by Chongvisal (2018) is applied in this study as a workplace spirituality development program for executives in one private organization in Thailand. This study aims to examine the effects of the development program and the structure of the causal relationships between workplace spirituality and the selected variables, including psychological capital, spiritual health, authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being. In brief, this is a longitudinal study examining the causal relationship model of the variables measured via the cross-lagged measurement models. The results are expected to be applied to employee and executive development in the organization.

Literature Review

Workplace spirituality has been defined by Robbins and Judge (2019) as an organization recognizing that people have inner lives which need nourishment from meaningful work in the context of community coexistence, and people want to find meaning and purpose in their work as well as connect with others and feel that they are a part of a community. Also, such was supported by five components, namely, a strong sense of purpose, focus on individual development, trust and respect, humanistic work practice, and toleration of employee expression. Currently, knowledge of approaches to develop workplace spirituality is limited. It is a relatively new area in the field of organizational theory, and the study on this subject has not yet been extensively studied. However, it was found that Chongvisal (2018) developed the manual and program entitled "The Development of Spiritual Health and Workplace Spirituality" to promote employees' workplace spirituality. This program encouraged trainees to experience their spiritual health and workplace spirituality, facilitating their inner work practices. Also, the program focused on experiential learning in which each group of trainees differed from one another. Therefore, learning activities could be customized according to trainees' experiences to gain great benefits. In addition, this program was divided into four modules: (1) Connect to Self, (2) Connect to Others, (3) Connect to Society and Environment, and (4) Planning for Spiritual Health and Workplace Spirituality Development.

Furthermore, spiritual health has been defined as the desire to achieve the ultimate goal of life in terms of quality of life involving positive relationships with self, others, and societies as well as the desire to discover the meaning of life (Marques et al., 2007).

The Spiritual Health for Development Assessment Scale developed by Chongvisal et al. (2010) was used in this study. It consists of seven components, namely, moral courage, loving kindness and compassion, goal and sufficiency, humanism, humility, forgiveness, and friendliness. For psychological capital theory, Luthans et al.'s (2007a) psychological capital theory was adopted. It was proposed that psychological capital consisted of hope, optimism, efficacy, and resilience. For authentic leadership theory, Walumbwa et al.'s (2008) theory was adopted. Authentic leadership was defined as a pattern of leadership behaviors drawing upon and promoting both positive psychological capacities and positive ethical climates to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized

moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers and fostering positive self-development. For job satisfaction, Robbins and Judge's (2019) theory was adopted; job satisfaction defined as a positive feeling about one's job resulting from an evaluation of its characteristics. Also, Chongvisal (2012b) summarized that job satisfaction consisted of eight components, namely, authority in the workplace, initiative, freedom to work, ability to work, success at work, work responsibility, and the ability and interpersonal relationship of the chief. For psychological well-being, Ryff and Singer's (2008) concept was adopted; psychological well-being divided into six components, namely, self-acceptance, positive relations with others, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and autonomy. Work values were measured using an ethical behavior scale, consisting of five values, namely, H: Honorable (honesty to self and others), U: Understanding (understand oneself and others), M: Mindful (mindful of work situations and one's own emotions), A: Assistance (provide assistance), and N: Nurturing (care).

Hypothesis

After completing the program, the post-test means of the study variables i.e., workplace spirituality, psychological capital, spirituality, spiritual health, authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being are expected to be higher than the pre-test means.

We employed the concept of Robbins and Judge (2019), who proposed that workplace spirituality is grouped into five components, namely, a strong sense of purpose, focus on individual development, trust and respect, humanistic work practice, and toleration of employee expression. However, studies on development ideas (i.e., approaches for developing workplace spirituality) are scarce because this field is relatively new and is undergoing research that seeks to enrich the knowledge in this field. One such study is by Chongvisal (2018), who developed courses and manuals, related to workplace spirituality. This course introduces trainees to the experience of spiritual health and workplace spirituality and aims to enhance employee development intrinsically by adopting this course and using it to analyze the results of the development. Training in the course focuses on experiential learning, where each group will undergo various trainings. Therefore, to gain maximum learning from group activities, the course can be applied or adjusted as appropriate.

This course is composed of four sets of activities, namely, connect to self, connect to offers, connect to society, and planning for the development of spiritual health and workplace spirituality (i.e., sets one to four, respectively).

Furthermore, the study employed the Spiritual Health for Development Assessment Scale by Chongvisal et al. (2010). The scale is divided into seven components, namely, moral courage; loving kindness and compassion; goal and sufficiency; humanism; humility; forgiveness; and friendliness. Moreover, we adopted the theory of psychology capital by Luthans et al. (2007a). The authors proposed that psychology capital consists of hope, optimism, efficacy, and resilience. Conversely, we used authentic leadership as discussed by Walumbwa et al. (2008), which consists of four elements, namely, self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing of information. For job satisfaction, Chongvisal (2012b) summarized this concept into eight components, namely, authority in the workplace, initiative, freedom to work, ability to work, success at work, work responsibility, and the ability and interpersonal relationship of the chief. The concept of psychological well-being was derived from Ryff and Singer (2008), which is grouped into six components, namely, self-acceptance; positive relations with others; personal growth; purpose in life; environmental mastery; and autonomy. Work values were measured using the behavior assessment model, which consists of five values, namely, H: honorable = honesty to self and others; U: understanding = understand yourself and others; M: mindful = awareness about work and personal emotional state; A: assistance = providing assistance, and N: nurturing = caring for others.

Methodology

This research was a longitudinal study which aimed to examine the causal relationship model of the study variables using the cross-lagged model. Data were collected before (pre-test) and after (post-test) participating in the program. In order to evaluate the program's effectiveness, the pre-test means and the post-test means were compared and analysed performing *t*-test for dependent samples. The duration of the research was 6 months (from March to August 2019). The program consisted of three training sessions on two days each. Follow-up on the development plan was conducted once a day for 1 day.

The development program was scheduled to be conducted three times. It was a two-day training for each. Also, a one-time follow up (one day) was included in the program.

Participants

71 executives working in one private hospital in Thailand were recruited and informed that participation in this study was voluntary. The participants were selected via purposive sampling. They were mostly female (76.06%) aged between 39 and 45 years (32.39%), married (56.34%), and graduated with a bachelor's degree (52.11%). Duration of tenure ranged from 17 to 24 years (36.62%) and from 12 to 17 years (33.80%). The majority of the designations held were department managers (43.66%) with 0 to 25 subordinates.

Instruments

In this research, the researcher collected data using the following instruments: Spiritual Health Scale developed by Chongvisal et al. (2010), Workplace Spirituality (Chongvisal, 2012a) built on the concept of Robbins and Judge (2009), Job Satisfaction Scale developed by Chongvisal (2012b), Psychological Well-being Scale translated and revised by Lornimiddee and Chongvisal (2017) from Ryff and Singer's (2008) measurement, Authentic Leadership Scale translated and revised by the researcher from Walumbwa et al.'s (2008) measurement, Psychological Capital Scale translated and developed by the researcher from the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-12) - Self-Rater Short Form Scoring Key, and work values scales. Back translation was performed by translators with proficiency in Thai and English languages. To validate these instruments, content validity was assessed by two psychologists and the instruments were tried out with 30 pilot participants. Reliability was tested by means of Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α); meanwhile, discrimination was tested by

means of Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC). The following results were yielded: Spiritual Health Scale: α = .91 (item discrimination [ID] = .31–.71); Workplace Spirituality Scale: α = .96 (ID = .48–.85); Job Satisfaction Scale: α = .96 (ID: .34–.80); Psychological Well-Being Scale: α = .92 (ID: .45–.77); Authentic Leadership Scale: α = .85 (ID: .29–.60); and Psychological Capital Scale: α = .85 (ID: .40–.76).

Data Analyses

The researcher asked for approval from the executive of the target organization to collect data from 71 executive participants. After data screening, data analyses were performed: frequency, percentage, means, standard deviation, and Pearson's product moment correlation analyses were performed using SPSS statistical software and path analysis via LISREL statistical software.

Results

Table 1 shows the results of *t*-test for dependent samples, comparing means of the study variables before (pre-test) and after (post-test) participating in the program.

Table 1 presents the effects of the spiritual health and workplace spirituality development program. Hypothesis testing was performed by means of comparing between pre-and post-test means, t-test for dependent samples. The results showed that the post-test means of workplace spirituality, psychological capital, spiritual health, authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being were higher than the pre-test means ($p < .05$), indicating that the program is effective.

The results of model evaluation showed that the proposed model fitted well with the empirical data, acceptable model fit statistics were derived (chi-square = 7.40; degree of freedom = 11; P = .76; tolerance value [RMSEA] = .00; comparative fit index [CFI] = 1.00; and Tucker–Lewis's index [TLI] = 1.0).

Table 1 Results of the t-test for dependent samples, comparing pre- and post-test means

Variable	Pre-test		Post-test		t-test	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p* (two-tailed)
1. Psychological capital	2.90	0.43	3.91	0.51	27.83	*p* < .01
2. Workplace spirituality	3.89	0.49	4.37	0.40	8.79	*p* < .01
3. Spiritual health	3.76	0.44	4.24	0.35	10.38	*p* < .01
4. Authentic leadership	2.17	0.34	3.07	0.39	35.02	*p* < .01
5. Work values	65.83	6.76	67.31	6.71	2.66	*p* < .05
6. Job satisfaction	3.81	0.49	4.21	0.48	9.57	*p* < .01
7. Psychological well-being	3.91	0.47	4.31	0.40	8.22	*p* < .01

Furthermore, the effect size analysis was conducted to establish the relationship structure through longitudinal research. The causal relationship is denoted as intervals across time (cross-lagged model). The causal variables were measured before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the program. The external causal variables (psychological capital, workplace spirituality, and spiritual health) were based on the measurement of data before the program. The remaining variables, namely, authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being are denoted as the effect variables of the three causal variables. Data were measured after obtaining the results of the effect size analysis (post-test). The study found a significant influence of the causal variables: psychological capital exerted direct effects on authentic leadership (direct effects = .50) and job satisfaction (direct effects = .42) but exerted an indirect effect on psychological well-being (indirect effects = .21). In addition, workplace spirituality directly influenced authentic leadership (direct effects = .24), work values (direct effects = .30), and job satisfaction (direct effects = .38) but indirectly influenced psychological well-being (indirect effects = .19). Lastly, spiritual health exerted a direct effect on psychological well-being (direct effects = .30), as presented in Table 2.

The empirical results showed that workplace spirituality had significant direct and indirect effects on authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being (Figure 1).

Figure 1 illustrates model 1 that depicts the influence of the pre-measured causal variables that can explain the post-measured variables authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being. Each causal relationship in the model is significant ($p < .05$) except for the non-significant correlation between psychological capital and workplace spirituality.

Several issues point to the limitation of using only one model for analysis in terms of whether authentic leadership influenced the three outcome variables, namely, work values, job satisfaction. The abovementioned model of authentic leadership exists as an outcome variable. Therefore, data were measured after the causal relationship that was not analyzed. The causal relationship may not have been observed for the same period in which the variables were measured simultaneously due to the fact that the influence of the variables on the dependent variable may take a certain amount of time to become observable. This unseen result may be the so-called sleeper effect or after-effect of the program or have been trained but it did not happen immediately. This result may emerge over time. Therefore, we aimed to verify the influence of authentic leadership on the three outcome variables to eliminate the possibility of the sleeper effect. One method is measuring authentic leadership, then applying the result on variables that were measured after. Figure 2 presents the model of analysis that resulted from this argument.

Table 2 Total effects (TE), indirect effects (IE), and direct effects (DE) of independent and dependent variables
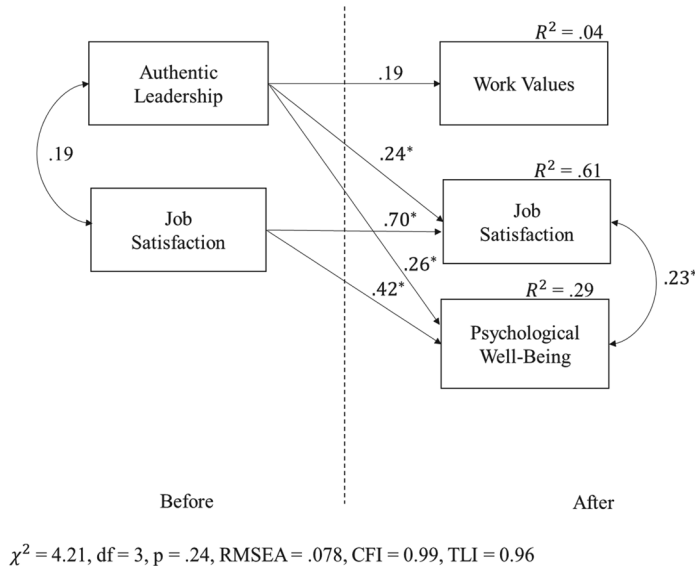
Dependent variable	Independent variables		
	Psychological Capital	Workplace Spirituality	Spiritual Health
Authentic Leadership			
DE	.50*	.24*	-
IE	-	-	-
TE	.50*	.24*	-
Work Values			
DE	-	.30*	-
IE	-	-	-
TE	-	.30*	-
Job Satisfaction			
DE	.42*	.38*	-
IE	-	-	-
TE	.42*	.38*	-
Psychological Well-Being			
DE	-	-	.30*
IE	.21*	.19*	-
TE	.21*	.19*	.30*

Note: *p < .05.
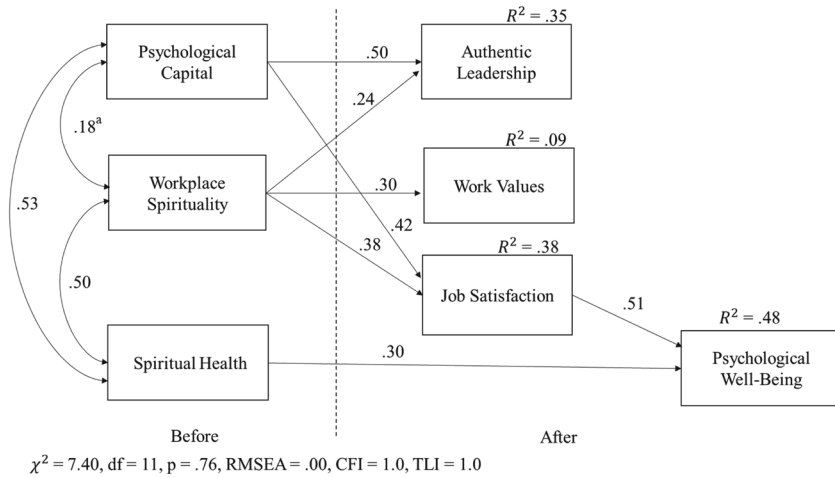
Figure 1 Path Analysis of Model 1
Note: independent variables [pre-test]: psychological capital, workplace spirituality, and spiritual health. Dependent variables [post-test]: authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being.

Figure 2 Path Analysis of Model 2
Note: Independent variables [pre-test]: authentic leadership and job satisfaction. Dependent variables [post-test]: work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being.

Figure 2 illustrates that if the measured variable of authentic leadership is used first, it will influence job satisfaction and psychological well-being at the second measurement with a statistical significance of $p < .05$ (effect size = .24 and .26 respectively). Another confirmation of the results of the previous analysis of the model for job satisfaction is the effect of psychological well-being. In the previous model, a causal relationship was found based on measurements during the same time period. Therefore, evidence may still be lacking regarding whether it is the real cause in terms of time, because the causal variable should occur before the result variable. Hence, in this model, the first measured variable is job satisfaction rather than psychological well-being because of the result variable as it was measured at a later time. The results of the analysis confirmed that the influence

was statistically significant ($p < .05$) (influence size = .42). The relationship between job satisfaction that was measured at pre- and post-test is in line with the longitudinal analysis. This line represents the consistency or stability of the variable, which explains that executives experienced high levels of job satisfaction before the program and retained this level after the program (effect size = .70). However, this relationship does not indicate whether it has changed and where change pertains to the level of the variable. Toward this end, we should compare the mean according to the results of the *t*-test, where a positive correlation indicates a change in the variable. Over time, however, these executives will continue to hold their values. The line segments indicate the tolerance between job satisfaction and psychological well-being, which was measured after the program. This line pertains to an error that indicates that the two variables are related because in this model it does not want to find this answer. At the same time, the line for the correlation answer indicates that the previous model provided clear answers. We infer that the discrepancy is not a causal relationship, because we prevented job satisfaction from competing for or extracting the variance of psychological well-being. Doing so will imply that the variance emerges from the causal and time relationships as a simultaneous measure.

Discussion

According to the comparative analysis of the means of the study variables before and after participating in the development program, the results indicate that the development program is effective, it is applicable to develop spiritual health and workplace spirituality. It was found that after the program, the post-test means of psychological capital, workplace spirituality, spiritual health, authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being were higher than the pre-test means ($p < .05$). These results are consistent with research related to the development of spiritual health and workplace spirituality, such as studies on spiritual development and educational culture among nursing students (Narayanasamy, 2006). Furthermore, this result is consistent with that of the study that found the sample group that underwent self-improvement training according to contemplative and regular practice tended to cultivate positive relationships with others. Moreover, the employees displayed better psychological well-being than an untrained group (Hanley et al., 2014).

The results are also consistent with the research on a connection at the spiritual level among university students. The study employed the action research approach and found that students who participated in the development of spiritual health exhibited a statistically significant increase (Chongvisal & Boonyarit, 2018).

In the current study, the results of effect size analysis were based on long-term data and interval causal relationship. The causal variables, which were measured at pre-test, are psychological capital, workplace spirituality, and spiritual health. The remaining (result) are authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being, which were measured at post-test. The results demonstrated that the causal variables exerted a significant influence on psychological capital (direct influence on authentic leadership; influence size = .50), which is consistent with the results of Munyaka et al. (2017). The authors identified the relationship between the two variables and found a significant statistical correlation. In addition, the current study found that psychological capital exerts a direct influence on job satisfaction (effect size = .42), which is consistent with that of Luthans et al. (2007), who measured and examined the positive relationship of psychological capital to performance and satisfaction. The results indicated that psychological capital was positively correlated to performance. Moreover, psychological capital exerted a statistically significant effect on satisfaction, which is in agreement with Sultana et al. (2018). The authors found that authentic leadership and psychological capital lead to job satisfaction. In this study, psychological capital exerts an indirect influence on psychological well-being (influence size = .21), which is consistent with that of Avey et al. (2010), who examined the positive effects of psychological capital on psychological well-being over time. In this study, psychological capital was related to employee well-being before and after the program.

Workplace spirituality exerted a direct influence on authentic leadership (influence size = .24), which is consistent with Chongvisal (2012), who proposed that workplace spirituality plays an important role and is the only variable that influences authentic leadership. Moreover, Chongvisal (2017) examined middle management and found that workplace spirituality directly influenced leadership and work values (influence size = .30). This result is consistent with that of Geigle (2012), who conducted an empirical study on workplace spirituality, which was found to impact employee values and attitudes. Moreover, we found that workplace

spirituality influences job satisfaction, which is also consistent with Geigle (2012) and Rashidin et al. (2019). The authors illustrated a relationship between spirituality and job satisfaction and between workplace spirituality and job satisfaction and the work. Moreover, Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2006) found that employees with working spirituality will foster job satisfaction among other employees. In addition, we found that workplace spirituality indirectly influences psychological well-being, which is consistent with Mckee et al. (2011); Ibrahim et al. (2020); and Arnold et al. (2007). Spiritual health exerts a direct effect on psychological well-being (influence size = 30), and is in line with Dunn et al. (2009), who investigated the spirituality experienced by nurses when caring for patients. In other words, spiritual perception is positively correlated to psychological well-being.

In addition, we verified whether authentic leadership resulted in the three result variables to rule out the sleeper effect, which emerged during the analysis of leadership variables of the causal factors that were measured before and after the program. We found that if authentic leadership is measured at the pre-test, then the results will significantly influence job satisfaction. This finding is consistent with relevant studies, such as Wong and Laschinger (2012). Moreover, the authors found that authentic leadership exerted a significant positive effect on empowerment, which helps to increase job satisfaction and performance among nurses. According to Azanza et al. (2013), authentic leadership and organization culture drive the job satisfaction of employees in private organizations. In addition, authentic leadership is a medium of positive relationships between organization culture and the job satisfaction of employees. Olaniyan and Hystad (2016) found that authentic leadership directly influences job satisfaction and indirectly influences job satisfaction through psychological capital. Lastly, Sultana et al. (2018) mentioned that authentic leadership and psychological capital influence job satisfaction.

When job satisfaction was measured at the pre-test and defined as the cause and psychological well-being was considered as the result variable, the analysis confirmed that job satisfaction exerts a significant effect on psychological well-being (effect size = .42), which is consistent with studies that found that job satisfaction was related to psychological well-being (Isqor & Haspolat, 2016; Olatunde & Odusanya, 2015), whereas job satisfaction influenced psychological well-being.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The results reiterate the importance of workplace spirituality with the promotion of organizational outcomes. The empirical data indicate that workplace spirituality significantly influences authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being regardless of whether the effect is direct or indirect. Therefore, behaviorist, sociologist, and organizational psychologists should pay more attention to workplace spirituality. Moreover, the results indicate the applicability of the course to development. The results from the comparative mean analysis before and after the course demonstrated that after the experiment all variables are psychological capital, workplace spirituality, spiritual health, authentic leadership, work values, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being. The means were statistically significantly higher than those before the experiment. The assessment results indicated that the course can be used for the development of workplace spirituality, spiritual health, and other variables. Furthermore, we found that if the variables of authentic leadership are measured first before the causal variables, the second measurement will exert a statistically significant effect on job satisfaction. In the same manner, job satisfaction should be measured before the cause to enable the measurement of psychological well-being as a result variable. The results confirmed that this influence was also statistically significant. Therefore, the organizations should follow these suggestions: (1) set goals to promote key psychological and social variables such as workplace spirituality and spiritual health among employees; (2) include workplace spirituality into organizational goals, culture, and core values; (3) apply the development program in this study to promote employees' workplace spirituality; and (4) conduct activities and projects focusing on fostering workplace spiritually-oriented culture.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

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