

Workplace Spirituality, Employee Well-Being, and Individual Work Performance in Public Universities: A Gender-Integrated Model

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the relationships among workplace spirituality (WS), employee well-being (EW), and individual work performance (IP) in Saudi public universities, with a special focus on gender. Drawing on positive organizational theory, a research model linking WS, EW, and IP is developed. A survey of 373 faculty members in Riyadh at four major public universities was conducted, and structural equation modelling (SEM) with AMOS program was used to examine the indicated relationships. Findings indicate that workplace spirituality positively influences employee well-being and employee well-being positively influences individual work performance. Workplace spirituality also has a direct positive influence on individual work performance, while relying on employee well-being as a moderator of this relationship.

KEYWORDS

Spirituality, Employee Well-Being, Public Universities, Work Performance, Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

As higher education continues to rapidly change, the pursuit of institutional excellence and sustainability has shifted from traditional performance assessments to focus on employee well-being (EW) in academics and workplace spirituality (WS). While EW represents the overall satisfaction in life and perceived worth of university faculty (Al-Sabi et al., 2024; Elshaer et al., 2025), WS embodies academics' search for meaning and motivational purpose, as well as their connectedness to the larger

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collective (Garg, 2017). EW and WS are variables potentially influencing these academics' individual work performance (IP). Previous literature has focused on determining independent relationships of WS and EW on organizational effectiveness across different sectors, while limited literature has examined the relation of WS and EW together, particularly the role gender plays on these effects.

The rationale for coupling WS and EW is that it creates a holistic view of understanding how to foster improvement in the work experience, engagement, and IP of academics. Under that premise, it is important to investigate the linkages between this kind of integration and subsequent IP outcomes of faculty workers. Investigating how these two concepts might shape each other, while also acknowledging the pervasive disparities of men and women in academia, yields valuable information for institutions to gain insight about harnessing the potential of their academic staff while also committing to a fair and thriving culture of work. The first related insight is that considering this convergence may be useful for clarifying how spirituality and well-being at work may provide benefits to the overall well-being of the academic. A workplace that allows for spirituality may allow professors to have a sense of purpose, resilience, and emotional regulation. However, the pathways to resilience could differ depending on how multiple realities are gendered. Female academics may have a heavier academic and family burden, making them more likely to value practices that consider connection and community in their well-being as opposed to freedom and purpose. Males, on the other hand, may consider the purpose and autonomy aspects of WS as more beneficial to their well-being. In this sense, it is reasonable that we can define our beliefs about WS and EW to facilitate well-being for all faculty in ways that promote job satisfaction, lower stress, and improve mental and physical health (Elshaer et al., 2025).

Secondly, understanding how the co-treatment of WS and EW informs academic IP and the relationship between men and women scholars helps to clarify how those constructs afford engagement. More specifically, while it is conceivable that WS addresses meaning and intellectual engagement in some way related to intrinsic motivation and engagement, intrinsically motivated academics with higher well-being will be more creative and effective as problem-solvers compared to academics with lower well-being. In this regard, the way performance is exhibited may be affected by the gender context. For example, women may channel their increased engagement into considering expanding their mentoring network or collaborative research projects while men may use their increased engagement for publishing more. This demonstrates that, even within a shared academic context that promotes scholarly productivity, individuals may engage in different actions based on their previous experiences and expectations of academic work.

In addition, WS and EW may assist in building an academic culture that is more supportive. An academic workplace that supports WS and EW are likely to create belonging and social goodwill among colleagues. This is particularly pertinent to counteract the alienation and microaggressions faced by women academics and other marginalized groups. This sense of claustrophobia and surfacing frustration may affect their sense of belonging and overall performance significantly more than their male counterparts. Overall, if the ways in which WS and EW are engaged offers a potentially useful approach for universities interested in leveraging their professors' intellectual and pedagogical productivity, it may encourage an academic workplace that is supportive of professors' spiritual needs and well-being, while fundamentally recognizing the experience and challenges of men and women could contribute to greater engagement, fulfillment, and performance equity among the whole faculty.

In this context, our research built upon previous research to explore how the relations between WS and EW contribute to IP of university professors. A key aim was to explore the gender differences in types of actions taken to engage in WS and EW and process the complexities of WS, EW, and IP through a gendered lens to add to the knowledge base of academics and institutions examining sustainability, collegiality, engagement, and developing equitable sustainable workplaces for 21st century academia.

The remainder of this study is constructed as follows. First, we present the theoretical basis and research hypothesis. Then we outline the research methods, including the data collection procedures,

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