Workplace spirituality as a source for competitive advantage: an empirical study

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Workplace spirituality as a source for competitive advantage: an empirical study

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to theorize and empirically examines the role of perceived spirituality in developing organization competitiveness.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper adopts a quantitative approach, where the structural equation modeling approached was applied to analyze a unique dataset collected from 550 health-care staff in two international hospitals in Iran.

Findings – The results show that although the workplace spirituality (WS) can indirectly enhance the development of competitive advantages by affecting the level of organizational commitment; however, the direct relationship of WS and competitive advantage has a higher path coefficient than its indirect one. Also, interestingly, it is found that, although WS affects the three dimensions of organizational commitment (affective, continuance and normative commitment), but only WS by mediating role of affective commitment can affect the competitive advantage at understudied hospitals.

Originality/value – This study makes important theoretical contributions by conceptualizing and validating the effect of WS on the development of organization competitive advantage. As such, the authors explicate the commitment-related paths through which WS can affect organization overall performance.

Keywords Competitive advantage, Organizational commitment, Workplace spirituality, Hospital

1. Introduction

The spirituality of employees can influence the performance of individuals and organizations alike (Rego and Cunha, 2008; Campbell and Hwa, 2014). Although employees, at the individual level, can feel a spiritual connection the workplace, which in turn can boost team effectiveness, job stratification and employee engagement (Rego and Cunha, 2008; Kolodinsky et al., 2008; Marschke et al., 2009; Debagh et al., 2012; Campbell and Hwa, 2014; Gupta et al., 2014; Roof, 2015; Fazio et al., 2017), spirituality at the organizational level can affect the organization values to the extent that it affects decision making and overall
strategic orientation (Kolodinsky et al., 2008). Furthermore, workplace spirituality (WS) shows a positive effect on overall organizational performance as it reduces stress, conflict, absenteeism and turnover intentions (Kumar and Kumar, 2014; Nicolaides, 2018) and improve employees well-being and quality of life (Karakas, 2010; Kumar and Kumar, 2014). Together, these studies suggest that organizations with a higher sense of WS can outperform those with little spirituality (Lloyd, 1990).

At the same time, the literature emphasizes the role of commitment as central to the relationship between spirituality and performance (Rego and Cunha, 2008). Based on Allen and Meyer’s (1990) work, organizations can experience three kinds of commitment: affective, continuance and normative. They affect, respectively, employee’s emotional attachment to the organization, involve perceived costs associated with resignation and the employee’s feelings of obligation toward the organization and their cognition of the organizational norms about loyalty to the organization (Dabir and Azarpira, 2017).

Although the connection between WS and commitment has received scholarly attention (Campbell and Hwa, 2014; Marschke et al., 2009; Gupta et al., 2014; Roof, 2015; Milliman et al., 2017), their role in creating and sustaining competitive advantage is less understood. In other words, the mechanism by which WS and commitment can drive competitiveness is not clear. On the contrary, the literature often has studied the effect of workplace spirituality on commitment and by other mediating variables investigated the role of spirituality on human resources (HR) and organizational concepts (Rego and Cunha, 2008; Marschke et al., 2009; Dehaghi et al., 2012; Campbell and Hwa, 2014). In fact, the direct and indirect effect of spirituality on organizational performance indexes has been less investigated. Therefore, this study aims to investigate whether workplace spirituality can affect directly the competitive advantage or only through a mediating variable like commitment dimensions it could be effective. To address these gaps, we set our key question as:

**Q1. How organizational commitment does mediate the relationship between perceived workplace spirituality and competitive advantage?**

To answer this question, we theorize a conceptual model that explains the collective effect of WS and commitment. We further test this model using a unique dataset that was collected from two of the most important Iranian international hospitals in the east of country. These two hospitals (Razavi Motel and Ghaem) were founded by the Holy Shrine Razavi Organization (HSRO) which is the owner of many companies and touristic complexes in Mashhad city, an important destination of religious tourism in the Middle East. HSRO has invested a plenty of physical and financial resources to increase the competitiveness of these two hospitals and consequently, these two hospitals could have earned a good reputation by offering the well-equipped medicine services to many local and foreign patients. However, based on the HSRO’s objectives, these hospitals should reach a higher place than the rivals by enhancing their competitive advantage. Because a volume of studies has already proved that one of the most important factors in an organization to create the competitive advantage is HR and its incentives and attitudes about the organization; therefore, it seems the study on HR of these two hospitals as a key competitive advantage would be valuable. Hence, this study to meet the research purposes has focused on the relationship of organizational commitment and spirituality among nurses of these two hospitals with the competitive advantage.

Overall, the study makes two important contributions. First, our study deviates from the mainstream approach of studying competitive advantages, which generally focuses on economic variables, such as costs and productivity of procedures, organizational resources,
innovation, workplace agility, knowledge transferring, motivational factors and social networking of organizations with suppliers (Al-Mahmeed, 2018; Sultan, 2014). In detail, we examine the role believes and emotions in advancing competitiveness, a topic that is still underexposed (Dabir and Azarpira, 2017). Second, we contribute to the debate regarding the relationship between spirituality and commitment, by showing that not all types of commitment are affected by spirituality. This finding provides new insights into the mechanisms through which organizations can yield benefits from the perceived spirituality of their staff and employees.

The remaining of the paper is organized as follow. Next, we review the associated literature and discuss each key conceptions of this study along with hypotheses development in Section 2. In the following section, we present the study methodology in Section 3, where we introduce the study context, discuss the sampling and data collection and analysis techniques. Finally, we discuss the findings and research limitations and to finish with the conclusion in Sections 4, 5 and 6, respectively.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1 Workplace spirituality and competitive advantage

WS is a nascent research domain that has gained prominent attention during the last decade. Because it explores how employees experience their work as fulfilling a “calling” for meaning and purpose (Milliman et al., 2017), research on WS has been not only informed by traditional organizational behavior theories, but it has been also fashioned with positive organizational scholarship, as both focus on the humanistic nature of individuals at work.

The notion of spirituality is rather different from the concept of religion. Spirituality is a proper subject of workplace, even when there is no common religion between employees (Moghimi et al., 2007). This means that employees can differentiate religion and spirituality in their workplace (Mitroff and Denton, 1999). In line with this premise, the current study follows a concept of spirituality that not considers any special kind of religion in its definition.

Drawing upon the desire to find one’s ultimate purpose in life and to live accordingly (Mitroff and Denton, 1999), spirituality at work refers to “the recognition of an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that take place in the context of community” (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000, p. 137). Following the conceptualization of Kolodinsky et al. (2008), WS can be intended as both a personal spirituality, when individuals incorporate their own spiritual values in the work setting and WS, which reflects how employees perceived spiritual ideals and values within the macro environment of an organizational setting. Moreover, in a person-environment fit perspective, the authors suggest that WS shows an interactive nature, whereas it “reflects the interaction between an individual’s personal spiritual values and the organization’s spiritual values” (Kolodinsky et al., 2008, p. 467).

Overall, according to Ashmos and Duchon (2000), WS includes three major elements: inner life; meaningful work and sociability. The expression of the being that is in each person and the recognition of a spiritual power beyond the mind essentially refers to the concept of inner life. The existence of this spiritual feeling leads people to live their outer and social life more satisfyingly. The authors argue that spirituality at work occurs when employees find a connection between their spiritual ideals and their work in a way that working becomes purposive, joyful, vocational and contributive. In other words, spirituality implies meaningful work. Finally, sociability refers to the presence of a broader community which people contribute with meaningful work and feel to be spiritually connected to.
Many studies present spirituality as a valuable source for organizations, to the extent that it can help to pursue efficiency and effectiveness (Cavanagh, 1999; Vasconcelos, 2018). Encouraging spirituality in workplace can lead to a number of advantages for both individuals and organizations, such as lower employees turnover (Gupta et al., 2014), higher honesty, trust, creativity, organizational commitment, organizational identification, as well as greater level of both job and rewards satisfaction (Benefiel, 2003; Farmer et al., 2019; Freshman, 1999; Kolodinsky et al., 2008; Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002; Klerk, 2005; Kinjerski and Berna, 2006; Moghimi et al., 2007; Tombaugh et al., 2005). In addition, companies that organized their human resource structures around spiritual values, such as motivating employees at work and encouraging employees to find meaning in work, often increase employee retention (Campbell and Hwa, 2014).

With regard to organizational performance, there is a plethora of research that supports the positive effect of WS on productivity, profitability and firm performance (Bierly et al., 2000; Dehler and Welsh, 1994; Konz and Ryan, 1999; Korac-Kakabadse and Korac-Kakabadse, 1997; Malik and Naeem, 2011; Maleki et al., 2012; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Pandey et al., 2009). To that regard, Loyd (1990) has shown that organizations with a higher WS outperform those that have little spirituality, whereas Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004) highlight that they achieve higher rates of returns, grow faster and are more efficient than lower spirituality organizations. More recently, Garg (2018) has argued that WS represents a necessary condition for the occurrence of organizational performance.

Although the extant literature has shown great interest in analyzing the effects of WS on both individual-based work parameters and organizational outcomes, less attention has been paid on the impact that spirituality can have on firm competitiveness. Moreover, although the relationship between spirituality and individual-related outcome has been well conceptualized (Kolodinsky et al., 2003), the mechanism through which spirituality affects organizational performance remains still vague (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Karakas, 2010; Garg, 2018). It is in this causal ambiguity that we place our arguments about WS as source of competitive advantage.

In line with the resources-based view perspective, Sherman et al. (1997) argued that modern, global and chaotic business environments led enterprises to change their competitive landscape as they need to develop a unique set of resources to take competitive advantage. Barney (1991) asserted that competitive advantage occurs when a firm implements value-creating strategy that cannot be implemented by any other competitors. In his words, it becomes a sustained competitive advantage when benefits of this strategy cannot be duplicated by competitors, because of the combination of firm resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable and not perfectly substitutable. From such perspective, WS leads to the emergence of complex organizational settings where meaningful work, spiritual values, solidarity and a corporate culture promoting loyalty, commitment and cohesion among employees contribute to improve the competitiveness of firm (Hitt et al., 1994; Sherman et al., 1997). Considering the numerous positive effects on both employees- and organization-related outcomes that mentioned research has shown, WS can be properly considered a valuable resource in terms of improving efficiency and effectiveness of organizations. Although benefits of spirituality at work are well known in the extant literature and despite the increasing emphasis on business ethics, meaningful work and humanistic management (Cacioppe, 2000; Cavanagh, 1999; Gull and Doh, 2004; Karakas, 2010; Laszlo, 2019; Melé, 2003; Pratt and Ashforth, 2003), spirituality-based organizations emerge rarely in actual business environments. This is due to the fact that positive effects of WS require a great alignment between personal and organizational spiritual values to meet both person-job and person-organization fit. A spiritual organization may not necessarily
experience better performance, if there is inconsistency between the spiritual work environment it creates and the presence of very nonspiritual employees (Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004). Moreover, in line with Barney (1991), the capacity of organizations to exploit a strong WS may be related to the presence of unique historical and societal conditions that gradually create its cultural substrate. Finally, WS emerges as a socially complex phenomenon, whereas people, culture, work processes, management and relational systems are strictly interconnected in an ambiguous causal chain and cannot be directly influenced by management. Taken together, path dependence, social complexity and causal ambiguity make it a resource not easily imitable or substitutable with other resources. These arguments suggest that WS is a valuable resource that may act as differentiator for competitive advantage. Accordingly, we elaborate the hypothesis that follows:

**H1.** Perceived WS has a positive effect on competitive advantage.

In particular, we expect a positive association between each component of WS and competitive advantage, therefore:

**H1a.** Meaningful work has a positive effect on competitive advantage.

**H1b.** Solidarity has a positive effect on competitive advantage.

**H1c.** Compliance to organizational values has a positive effect on competitive advantage.

### 2.2 The role of organizational commitment

Although the causal chain that links WS and competitive advantage is (rightly) ambiguous, for spiritual organizations competitiveness is mainly centered on people and on how people feel committed with organizational values and aims. This rationale is in line with the assumption that HR represents one of the most vital sources of competitive advantage (Fawcett et al., 2008).

The core of spirituality is about people sharing and experiencing common attachment, attraction and togetherness within their work environments and the overall organization (Harrington et al., 2004; Mitroff and Denton, 1999). Companies that provide an element of spirituality in the everyday working life engage both hearts and minds of their people. Kolodinsky et al. (2003) find a spillover effect of highly spiritual organizational climate on both intrinsic and extrinsic work-related rewards, as it fosters participation and inclusiveness. Most research suggests that spirituality positively encourages personal fulfillment, engagement and supportive attitudes of employees toward organization, thus improving their commitment at work (Milliman et al., 2003, 2017; Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002; Pfeffer and Vega, 1999; Roof, 2015). Moreover, it generates a climate of trust that becomes essential for enhancing employees’ commitment (Burack, 1999; Kriger and Hanson, 1999).

The relationship between workplace spirituality and commitment has been addressed by numerous studies, which show divergent evidence with regard to the effective, normative and continuance dimensions of commitment. Organizational commitment can be defined as a mental and emotional attachment to organization (Hunt et al., 1989; Allen and Meyer, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1997) and it emerges as a multidimensional construct (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Among the others, Meyer and Allen (1991) categorized organizational commitment into:
• affective commitment, which refers to employees’ emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization;
• normative commitment, when employees look at job as an obligation and they feel a sense of obligation to remain with the organization; and
• continuance commitment, which refers to commitment based on the costs that employees associate with leaving the organization.

Such dimensions have shown different effects with regard to workplace spirituality. Normative and affective commitment have been found to generate loyalty in organization, in a way that that performances that draw upon these dimensions have a deeper and “thicker” characteristic that reinforces long term organizational health (Campbell and Hwa, 2014).

Chelliah et al. (2018) underline that workplace spirituality is significantly correlated with all three dimensions of organizational commitment, but with a different correlation strength. The empirical work of Campbell and Hwa (2014) shows that workplace spirituality, through the alignment between personal and organizational values, the sense of enjoyment and the feeling of contribution to community, has a positive effect on affective and normative commitments. In detail, the authors highlight that all components of WS are positively related to affective and normative dimensions of organizational commitment, whereas only sense of enjoyment and contribution to community significantly impact the decrease of continuance commitment. In a similar vein, Rego and Cuna (2008) find that affective and normative commitment is positively related to the presence of workplace spirituality, whereas continuance commitment is negatively affected by it. This essentially means that WS leads people to be less instrumentally committed to the organization, because the sense of identification and obligation toward it prevails. In line with these results, more recently the impact of WS on affective commitment has been also found among nurses and nurses’ performance outcomes (Kazemipour et al., 2012). Overall, these findings suggest that WS contribute to increase emotional attachment and sense of loyalty and obligation toward the organization. Conversely, it negatively affects continuance commitment, as the intrinsic emotional nature of spirituality and the sense of empathic engagement it determined are at odds with the rational and calculative motivation that this kind of commitment implies.

Therefore and as depicted in Figure 1, we propose the following hypotheses:

**Figure 1.**
Conceptual model of the research
**H2.** Organizational perceived spirituality has a positive effect on affective commitment.

**H3.** Organizational perceived spirituality has a positive effect on normative commitment.

**H4.** Organizational perceived spirituality has a negative effect on continuance commitment.

However, although the relationship between WS and organizational commitment has been explored with reference to all components of commitment, it is likely that the impact of WS on competitive advantage is more strictly connected with the affective dimension. Reasons to promote organizational commitment are numerous in the extant literature (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Bouraoui et al., 2018; Dehaghi et al., 2012; Fazio et al., 2017; Milliman et al., 2003; Rezaeian, 2003). For instance, it is important for enhancing functional retention of employees, thus allowing companies to maintain their operation over time and avoid empowered employees turnover (Rezaeian, 2003). Nevertheless, promoting affective commitment rather than normative or continuance commitment would be what makes the difference in terms of competitive advantage. The literature is quite unanimous in reporting that affective commitment is always positively related to the majority of job performance and well-being indicators (Cohen, 1991; Jaramillo et al., 2005; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002; Meyer and Maltin, 2010; Randall, 1990; Riketta, 2002). Normative commitment shows weak, albeit positive, correlations with both types of outcome, whereas continuance commitment is normally negatively correlated with them (Meyer et al., 2002; Meyer and Maltin, 2010). To that regard, Meyer and Allen (1997) suggest that continuance commitment does not elicit a sense of contribution to the organization, often leading to undesirable work behaviors. Conversely, people who feel high affective commitment to the organization work proactively and develop a sense of belonging and they feel their job as inherently satisfying (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Rezaeian, 2003; Vandenberghe, 2011). Above all, affective commitment is strongly related to the presence of organizational citizenship behaviors (Riketta, 2002), which lead employees to work beyond any kind of obligation, sense of compliance or calculative motivation. For the purposes of the present study, this state of affairs leads to assume that what would act as competitive differentiator is affective commitment. This form of emotional and emphatic attachment to the organization ensures a unique synergist convergence of contributive behaviors, inspiring values, participative and collaborative culture, alignment between organizational and personal goals, job satisfaction, identification, sense of community and outstanding performance at different levels. When affectively committed, employees experience an intrinsic willingness to contribute to the organizational objectives, feeling identified with it. When analyzing behaviors driven by normative commitment, a disjunction between personal and organizational dimensions emerges to the extent that employees contribute because they would avoid the sense of guilt and anxiety due to failing others’ expectations (Meyer et al., 2004; Vandenberghe, 2011). Such a disjunction becomes more apparent when employees are motivated by continuance commitment, as they tend to work for avoiding costs related to job loss. In both the last cases, the attachment to the organization implies a kind of individualistic motivation, be it moral obligation or utilitarian purpose. However, this circumstance does not necessarily imply lower performance because employees work to keep their job tasks, albeit for personal aims. Therefore, although it is possible to assume that affective commitment may generate a positive causal chain that contribute to competitive advantage, we cannot assume that normative and calculative commitment always show a negative influence. It is would be true when the normative or instrumental attachment of employees elicit counterproductive behaviors, but it may not the
case if employees fulfill their tasks. At most, we can assume that, because they can guarantee in-role performance, they have no particular influence on competitive advantage.

\[ H5. \] Affective commitment has a positive effect on competitive advantage.

\[ H6. \] Normative commitment has no effect on competitive advantage.

\[ H7. \] Continuance commitment has no effect on competitive advantage.

Accordingly, we suggest that WS has influence on competitive advantage through indirectly impacting organizational commitment and specifically affective organizational commitment. This means that the influence of WS on firm competitiveness only take place if affective commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors are enabled among employees. Conversely, we propose that normative and continuance commitment does not mediate this relation.

\[ H8. \] Affective commitment mediates in a positive way the relationship between perceived WS and competitive advantage.

\[ H9. \] Normative commitment does not mediate the relationship between perceived WS and competitive advantage.

\[ H10. \] Continuance commitment does not mediate the relationship between perceived WS and competitive advantage.

Figure 1 summarizes our conceptual model.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study context

For the purpose of this study, we conducted our empirical investigation on two international hospitals in Mashhad City (International Hospitals of Razavi and Ghaem). We were motivated by two main aspects. First, by affecting organizational commitment, WS directly influences attitudes and behaviors of employees. This means that the relationship between WS and competitive advantage, through the mediation role of organizational commitment, appear much more prominently in service organizations, where employee behaviors and quality of services can highly affect customers’ perceptions (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996). Accordingly, we investigated nurses’ perceptions, as nurse staff represents the most important servicing workforce into hospitals. Their attitudes and behaviors directly influence the interaction with customers, thus working as important resources of competitive advantage for a hospital (Fawcett et al., 2008). Second, these contexts are suitable to explore the role of WS in fostering competitive advantage. Nursing literature generally recognizes the importance of spirituality for holistic patient care, having the nurse–patient relationship an intrinsic spiritual nature (Martsolf and Mickley, 1998; O’Brien, 2017; Reed, 1992). As a whole, spiritual care cannot be taken separately from physical, social and psychological care (Bradshaw, 1994). According to O’Brien (2017), spirituality is an essential characteristic of nursing profession, due to its spiritual history, the importance of patients’ spiritual needs and the role of nurses in providing spiritual care.

Mashhad is the second modern big city of Iran country where is the religious tourism destination of Shie Muslims (Saadatyar et al., 2019). The management of religious places in this city is HSRO which is the owner of many companies and touristic complexes in Mashhad city. It basically manages one of the most important religious places in east of Iran country and therefore, this organization earns and benefits from the religious tourists
whom come from other cities and Islamic countries to this city. Along with many companies which are handled by this organization (HSRO), it has invested in health sector of this city. Two of the biggest international hospitals which supported by this entity are Ghaem and Razavi Motel Hospitals. Ghaem hospital has been launched by HSRO thereabout 40 years ago that at the moment it contains all required medical health departments. Another one is International Motel Hospital of Razavi that has been invested and founded 14 years ago. It has 43 hectares of land that includes vast green area and all needed medical departments. HSRO organization has invested in these two projects to improve their place in healthy sector, whereas it intends to catch the most market share among rivals in the Middle East region. For HSRO It does not seem too far goal because among neighbor countries around Iran country, a few hospitals have been founded which have this potential same as Razavi and Ghaem hospitals. It can be acknowledged by the countless number of clients who travel a long distance from different cities and countries within and around of Iran. However, for the reason of HSRO organization’s objectives, these hospitals should be act much more efficient to create and amplify their competitive advantage in order to compete with existing rivals. Hence, the study on HR and whatever which improves their efficiency sounds valuable. Because as it was mentioned before, one of the most important factors in an organization to create the competitive advantage is HR and its incentives and attitudes about the organization.

3.2 Sample and data collection
Statistical population of this research is nursing staff of Razavi International Motel Hospital (RIMH), and Ghaem International Hospital (GIH) in Mashhad city, which involves about 1152 (670 in RIMH, 482 in GIH).

Regarding sample size, considering two elements for proper fitness of the model and research methodology, and by using Cochran formula (with 0.95 reliability and 0.05 errors) and Hafeznia’s (2003) approach, the least possible volume is calculated as 422 respondents. A team comprising ten postgraduate students was used for data collection. Based on the nurses working shift (three different shifts) and working schedules of different departments of two considered hospitals, a plan was designed to distribute questionnaires. This plan was given to students and they attended in two considered hospitals to distribute and collect questionnaires. Also, these students helped the nurses to full the questionnaires in order obtaining the prices data. Overall, the whole time period that lasted to collect data was about 2 months. It was because that the nurses sometimes were too busy or the nurses of some departments were less available to collaborate with research team. Eventuality, 600 questionnaires were distributed, but only 550 questionnaires were correctly and fully completed by respondents (response rate is about 91.67 per cent).

Regarding the sociodemographic features of respondents, 62 per cent of respondents constitutes of men, whereas 54 per cent of them are in master’s degree and rest of them have under postgraduate. Also, in respective 39 and 36 per cent percentage of respondents are in range of 40-49 and 30-39 years old. Also, 41 per cent of the sample has experience in nursing about 10-15 years. It is worth mentioning that 100 percentage of respondents are under contractual employment.

3.3 Measures and validity
To measure workplace spirituality, we used 18 questions for three dimensions (meaningfulness, solidarity and compliance to values of organization), see Table I, which we adapted from Milliman et al. (2003). Also, we used 22 questions to measure organizational commitment that are adapted from Meyer and Allen (1997) with three dimensions (affective,
continuance and occupational commitment), see Table II. Finally, to measure competitive advantages, we used 17 items which we adapted from Hoseini (2011), see Table III.

As shown in Tables I, II and III, this uses cross-loading approach to examine discriminant validity. The results of this examination illustrate that the cross-loadings of each item is over than 0.5 that it means the constructs and their items have a proper validity (Joseph et al., 2017; Hulland, 1999). Also, to assure proper measurement of test content and motivation of participants, validity for face and content of questionnaire were confirmed by academic experts and professional practitioners of research population. Structural validity of questionnaire will be studied through confirmatory factor analysis. Reliability of questionnaire was also assessed by Cronbach’s alpha, the most common compatibility test for multifactorial scales which it was shown in Tables I, II, and III.

Next, we performed correlational tests to determine relationships between variables at 1 per cent significant level, see Table IV. The results of the correlation test show that every correlation coefficient is significant at 0.01 significance level, which indicates that all tested variables have a positive significant relationship. Also, Table IV presents the descriptive statistics of obtained data and determines the mean and standard deviation of all understudy variables and their dimensions.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The first step consists of determining measurement model through estimation of reliability and validity. The second step consists of determining structural model through analysis of path analysis, determination coefficients (R-squared) and fitness indices. In each step, “Smart partial least squares (PLS)” and “SPSS” were used. Chin and Newsted (1999), Hair et al. (2011, 2018) provide recommendations when to use Smart PLS. Basically, the most important reason to select a methodology is the research goal (structure or prediction). The

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I. Dimensions of spirituality variable</th>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Cross loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaningfulness</td>
<td>I am feeling happy at my work</td>
<td>0.587</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My job causes a kind of spirituality feeling in my side</td>
<td>0.594</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To my opinion, my job is important</td>
<td>0.580</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I always eager to go at my work</td>
<td>0.512</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My job makes I feel that I am a useful person in society</td>
<td>0.510</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The conception and importance of this job in clear for me</td>
<td>0.592</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>Job which needs to collaborate with colleagues is valuable for me</td>
<td>0.592</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I believe that, all employees protect each other</td>
<td>0.642</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At this hospital, I am free to say my opinions</td>
<td>0.557</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think all employee know the goals of this hospital</td>
<td>0.527</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I believe, at this hospital, all employees care about each other</td>
<td>0.513</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel that I am a member of a family at this hospital</td>
<td>0.596</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance to values of organization</td>
<td>The values of this hospital are worth for me</td>
<td>0.654</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This hospital takes care about all its employees</td>
<td>0.584</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The objectives of this hospital are important for me</td>
<td>0.541</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This hospital cares for the health of all its personals</td>
<td>0.588</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel that I have an important role in realizing of the hospital’s goals</td>
<td>0.520</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This hospital cares about meeting of my spiritual and emotional needs of mine at workplace</td>
<td>0.541</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Cronbach’s alpha of spirituality variable = 0.845; Composite reliability = 0.88
primary purpose of the PLS approach is to predict the indicators by means of the components expansion (Jöreskog and Wold, 1982). In line with this notion, Hair et al. (2011; p. 144) recommend: “If the research is exploratory or an extension of an existing structural theory and if the study’s purpose is predicting key target constructs or identifying key “driver” constructs, should be selected PLS approach. Therefore, based on the current study’s purpose, Smart PLS was adapted to analyze the gathered data.

In step one, estimation of reliability and validity is used to study measured model. Dominant method for estimation of inner compatibility is Cronbach’s alpha and another method of estimation is composite reliability. Composite reliability shows that to what extent each variable in measurement model is described by observed variables. According to Tables I, II and III, values show good reliability for test tool. Also, studying factor loading of the variable seen in relation with the variable as a threshold limit, these values must be more than 0.5 (Hulland, 1999). Values seem to be more than 0.5 that confirms validity of questionnaire.

The second step in Hulland’s procedure is benefiting path analysis, determination coefficients and fitness indices. Concepts of path analysis in their best form are determined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Cross loading</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>CR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
<td>I will be happy to spend the rest of my service in this hospital</td>
<td>0.568</td>
<td>0.750</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I enjoy, when I speak about my job and this hospital with others</td>
<td>0.501</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel the problem of this hospital is just like my problem</td>
<td>0.539</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am not sure, I can like other organizations just like my interesting in this hospital</td>
<td>0.537</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At this hospital, I feel that I am as a member of this family</td>
<td>0.625</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am interested in this hospital emotionally</td>
<td>0.630</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This hospital has many important meanings for me personally</td>
<td>0.549</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am feeling a kind of obligation about this hospital</td>
<td>0.512</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance commitment</td>
<td>I am afraid of the leaving’s consequences this hospital</td>
<td>0.633</td>
<td>0.872</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If I leave this hospital right now, my life extremely will be destroyed</td>
<td>0.558</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leaving my work might be costly and damaging for me</td>
<td>0.575</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staying at this hospital is because of both necessity and my personal interest</td>
<td>0.624</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel the possibility of finding another job is unlikely</td>
<td>0.532</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One of the serious reasons for not leaving this work is the shortage of job</td>
<td>0.563</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel that people leave their works too much</td>
<td>0.636</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational commitment</td>
<td>I believe that a person should be always loyal to his organization</td>
<td>0.532</td>
<td>0.815</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To me, leaving work place is an immoral act</td>
<td>0.550</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One of the basic reasons to staying at this hospital is that in my mind, loyalty is important. So, I consider myself committed to staying in this organization</td>
<td>0.581</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If even I find a proper job, I think that leaving here is not an appropriate act</td>
<td>0.640</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being loyal to an organization has trained to me</td>
<td>0.601</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think when people were more loyal to their organizations, everything was better than now</td>
<td>0.781</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Even now as before, it is rational if somebody wants to be famous because his loyalty to his organization</td>
<td>0.574</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: α = Cronbach’s alpha; CR = Composite reliability

Table II. Dimensions of organizational commitment variable
through their major properties, i.e. path diagram that reveals possible causal linkages among variables. Structural equation model and overall diagram (in Figure 2) and partial path diagram (in Figure 3) show research path that consists of path coefficients. In fact, overall diagram in Figure 2 explains path coefficients between all main variables including commitment dimensions. It means this figure illustrates the analysis result of each hypothesis of this study. It is although, the Figure 2 is a partial path diagram and it explains other results that related to the relationship between spirituality’s dimensions and competitive advantage that it has not been shown in previous figure. It should be explained that dotted paths in Figure 1 show that these paths are not meaningful in 5 per cent level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Cross loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique merits</td>
<td>Science ability of this hospital in comparison with others?</td>
<td>0.867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical and equipment property of this hospital in comparison with others?</td>
<td>0.926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The reputation of this hospital’s brand between people?</td>
<td>0.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How far this hospital respect to clients and their rights?</td>
<td>0.919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To supply new services, how much this hospital welcome and consider its personal’s creativity</td>
<td>0.625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How far this hospital uses advanced and updated equipment?</td>
<td>0.522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>How far this hospital uses new process and services in comparison with other hospitals</td>
<td>0.578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How the situation of supplied services of this hospital in comparison with other hospitals</td>
<td>0.566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How far the supplied services by this hospital is rare compared with other hospitals?</td>
<td>0.536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How much does this hospital react to changes in the outside environment (such as new therapies, new medical equipment, etc.)?</td>
<td>0.578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintainability</td>
<td>What is the investment capability of this hospital in therapy services?</td>
<td>0.526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How much does the hospital care for continuous education and learning?</td>
<td>0.566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How important is the quality of services and facilities in this hospital?</td>
<td>0.651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you think, how far the offered services by this hospital are more unique than before?</td>
<td>0.701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you think, how far the offered services by this hospital can be unique in future?</td>
<td>0.911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunism</td>
<td>To what extent does the hospital pay attention to its interests in providing services?</td>
<td>0.769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How important is timely services at this hospital?</td>
<td>0.925</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Cronbach’s alpha of spirituality variable = 0.825; Composite reliability = 0.95

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Workplace spirituality</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.3188</td>
<td>0.51529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Organizational commitment</td>
<td>0.702*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.8384</td>
<td>0.33428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Affective dimension</td>
<td>0.645*</td>
<td>0.578*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.8273</td>
<td>0.40905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Normative dimension</td>
<td>0.644*</td>
<td>0.394*</td>
<td>0.891*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.8207</td>
<td>0.41974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Continuance dimension</td>
<td>0.510*</td>
<td>0.440*</td>
<td>0.896*</td>
<td>0.595*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.8671</td>
<td>0.48074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>0.619*</td>
<td>0.759*</td>
<td>0.582*</td>
<td>0.617*</td>
<td>0.425*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6198</td>
<td>0.435</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table IV.** Correlation matrix of variables and descriptive statistics

**Note:** *p < 0.01
Several studies have provided different indices to test fitness of the model, but a major one is partial and relative classification and fitness of internal and external model (Henseler et al., 2014). The following table shows fitness indices for conceptual model of the current research. According to Table V, it could be concluded that the research model is fitted very well. Therefore, based on indices of model fitness, tested model is confirmed.

4. Findings
Results of analyses are shown in Table VI. They determine whether, by considering path coefficient among direct paths and significance level with less than 0.05, paths under study are meaningful or not, and consequently confirmation or rejection of hypotheses become evident. These results confirm H1, 1a, H1b and 1c, because they show that the three dimensions of perceived WS – meaningfulness of work, solidarity and compliance with organizational values – have positive and significant influence on competitive advantage. Moreover, our analysis shows that WS is significantly correlated to all three dimensions of organizational commitment (affective, normative and continuance), whereas the relationship between organizational commitment and competitive advantage is significant only for the affective dimension. No significant effects are found for normative and
continuance dimensions of commitment. Therefore, they cannot play an effective role as a mediator. This evidence confirms our H2, H3, H5, H6 and H7. Conversely, H4 is rejected, as we suggested that the relationship between WS and continuance commitment was negative, whereas results demonstrate a positive significant correlation.

Looking at indirect paths (Table VII), perceived WS has a positive and significant influence on competitive advantage only through the mediation of affective commitment. As supposed, results confirm that normative and continuance commitment does not
significantly mediate the relation between WS and organizational commitment. Accordingly, H8, H9 and H10 are supported.

5. Discussion
The overarching aim of this study is to theorize and empirically examine the mechanism through which WS and organizational commitment can influence organizational competitiveness. In line with our arguments, the findings support that WS can be a valuable resource for competitive advantage. The multidimensional nature of WS guarantees a profound alignment of intents, cultural values and spiritual needs into the organizational environment. This means that meaningful work, sense of community and compliance with the overall organizational values are present at different levels of organization, i.e. work processes, HR practices, relational systems, organizational culture, management structures and leadership style. This unique configuration, where both person-job and person-organization fit occurs, significantly impacts organizational competitiveness, thus acting as competitive differentiator into the reference context. Moreover, results show that the positive effects of WS on organizational competitiveness are partly mediated by affective commitment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Path coefficient</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>t-statistics</th>
<th>Significant value</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1. WS has a positive effect on competitive advantage</td>
<td>0.272</td>
<td>0.0579</td>
<td>5.102</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1a Meaningful work has a positive effect on competitive advantage</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>0.0593</td>
<td>3.200</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b Solidarity has a positive effect on competitive advantage</td>
<td>0.298</td>
<td>0.0597</td>
<td>4.998</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1c Compliance to organizational values has a positive effect on competitive advantage</td>
<td>0.381</td>
<td>0.0576</td>
<td>6.612</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2. WS has a positive effect on affective commitment</td>
<td>0.369</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>6.188</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3. WS has a positive effect on normative commitment</td>
<td>0.358</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4. WS has a negative effect on continuance commitment</td>
<td>0.672</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>14.129</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5. Affective commitment has a positive effect on competitive advantage</td>
<td>0.292</td>
<td>0.0693</td>
<td>3.492</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6. Normative commitment has no effect on competitive advantage</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.0783</td>
<td>0.359</td>
<td>0.715</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7. Continuance commitment has no effect on competitive advantage</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.0836</td>
<td>3.492</td>
<td>0.611</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Path coefficient</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H8. Affective commitment mediates in a positive way the relationship between perceived WS and competitive advantage</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H9. Normative commitment does not mediate the relationship between perceived WS and competitive advantage</td>
<td>0000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H10. Continuance commitment does not mediate the relationship between perceived WS and competitive advantage</td>
<td>0000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
commitment, whereas no mediation can (reasonably) be performed by normative and continuance commitment. This is consistent with the evidence that affective commitment, due to its emotional attachment and compliance with organizational values (Campbell and Hwa, 2014), better reflects elements of spirituality in workplace, whereas normative and continuance commitments are related, respectively, to the sense of obligation or utility to work. However, the significance of both direct and indirect paths of relationship suggests that organizational commitment performs only a “partial mediation.” In line with Zhao et al. (2010), this is a case of “complementary mediation.” Mediated relationship exists, but it is not the unique path to achieve competitive advantage, as WS is found to directly impact competitive advantage on its own. From a theoretical perspective, this circumstance is challenging with reference to two aspects. First, we proposed a direct relationship between WS and competitive advantage, by elaborating on the elements that link the construct of spirituality with the dimensions of competitive advantage. In this way, we argued that WS may act as competitor differentiator because it is valuable, rare, not perfectly imitable and substitutable due to effects of path dependence, causal ambiguity and social complexity. However, future research may add knowledge on which causal mechanisms are involved in the direct relationship between WS and competitive advantage. Second, although we based our mediation model on the positive effects that WS has on competitive advantage through affective commitment, it is likely that other alternative mediators occur in the indirect relationship.

Moreover, perceived WS is found to be positively correlated with all commitment dimensions. Although for affective and normative commitment we predicted this significance, it is surprising to find positive correlations between WS and continuance commitment. This evidence diverges from prior investigations (Campbell and Hwa, 2014; Rego and Cunha, 2008; Marschke et al., 2009; Dehaghi et al., 2012; Roof, 2015; Farmer et al., 2019) suggesting that high levels of WS does not ensure lower continuance commitment. On the one hand, such divergence from previous studies might be related to diverse statistical population and study context. On the contrary, it might hide more complex relations between the two constructs. To that regard, a deepened explanation of which dimension of WS (meaningfulness, solidarity, compliance to organizational values) is mainly involved in this kind of results could be useful. For instance, considering that WS can be enabled at two different levels – personal and organizational – it might be the case of a high presence of very nonspiritual employees (Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004) or the case of spiritual people who are not aligned with spiritual values of organization.

Overall, this study makes several contributions. For scholars, we answer the claim for developing causal models that link WS individual and organizational performance (Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004). From a theoretical perspective, our conceptual model offers a comprehensive understanding about the contribution of WS to competitive advantage and the attributes that make spirituality a proper competitive differentiator in the actual business environments. To that end, we highlight that the presence of a personal inner life leads people to search for meaningfulness in work and to feel an emotional attachment, an affective commitment to the organization whose spiritual values satisfy employees’ own spiritual needs. Moreover, the existence of a complementary or partial mediation suggests that two alternative paths exist for linking WS to competitive advantage to the extent that affective commitment represents one of several potential mediators that could explain such relationship. This evidence paves the way for further theoretical developments and empirical assessments in WS literature.

From a practical perspective, the results support the importance to foster WS as a source of competitive advantage. Clearly, these findings are particular important for those
organizations where spirituality is a prominent attribute of work, such as nursing profession into hospitals. From such perspective, when the intent is to develop better working strategy, managerial action should pay more attention to the effect of perceived spirituality and affective commitment. This approach requires the implementation of a number of interventions on different levels of the organization, because the impact of WS on organizational competitiveness is strictly related to two kinds of fit: 1) the alignment between personal spirituality of employees and their own (meaningful) job and 2) the alignment between people’ spiritual values and organizational values. A lack in this twofold alignment may result in counterproductive and negatively impacting behaviors that weaken rather than enhance competitive advantage. Finally, spirituality-driven organizations should focus on the affective dimension of commitment rather than normative and continuance commitment. This means that spirituality at work should be oriented to develop an emotional attachment to the organization, as moral obligation and individualistic utility cannot be the means to make the difference in the competitive landscape.

5.1 Limitations and future research directions
Similar to previous work, our study suffers from some limitations which discuss as future research directions as follow. First, in our sample, we adopted a general approach in recruiting the respondents, we did not control for the types of health-care staff. Therefore, future studies can investigate other variables such as the level of nursing job (nurse assistant, nurse), the nature of nursing job (urgency, surgery, etc.) or contractual status (permanent staff vs fixed term) which in turn can provide new insights to the findings of this study. Second, in this study we only focused on WS construct as “the recognition of an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that take place in the context of community” (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000, p. 137). Therefore, there is a need to complement our work by investigating individual spirituality which relates to religion of personnel as well as their moral and ethical beliefs. In this way, researchers can study further the religious view of employees toward their job and organizations, where few studies, such as Vitell et al. (2016), show that the perception of spirituality has a strong connection with the national culture. Here, creating a proper measurement of individual and religious dimension of individuals is particularly needed. Finally, as we collect the data via self-reporting technique the study might suffer from the issue of common-bias method. We sought to reduce this risk by considering a proper sample size (550 people) and also by recruiting a diversified the sample that comprises a wide range of participants (Dodd-McCue and Tartaglia, 2010; Althubaiti, 2016); the sample covers nurses from various hospital departments, different working shifts, multiple locations and contractual types. Yet, we suggest that future should collect data from multiple sources (e.g. through a national survey) or at different time points.

6. Conclusion
This study focuses on the role of organizational commitment and perceived WS in building organizational competitiveness. Results show that having employees with higher affective commitment can be viewed as a factor creating of competitive advantage for hospitals. This implies that emotionally involving personnel (nursing staff) with work and organization can bring beneficial impacts for organization. Hence, long-term planning for linking emotions and values among personnel can enhance the competitive position of the organization.
References


Further Reading


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