






# “Workplace spirituality, employee engagement, and professional commitment: A study of lecturers from Indonesian universities”

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# WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY, EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT, AND PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT: A STUDY OF LECTURERS FROM INDONESIAN UNIVERSITIES

## Abstract

The attention paid by researchers and practitioners to the relationship between employee engagement and spirituality in the workplace is limited, as studies of the two variables still stand alone. This leads to an important and increased emphasis on strength and employee engagement that are built on the organizational culture to show an awareness of spirituality in the workplace. This study aimed to explore the relationship between workplace spirituality and employee engagement of lecturers in Indonesia and professional commitment as a mediator. The respondents of the study were 322 lecturers from state and private universities in Indonesia. Validity, reliability, simple regression, and path analysis were used to analyze the data. The results of the study showed that workplace spirituality had a direct effect on employee engagement, with the  $\beta$  value of 0.836, and the R-square of 70%, while professional commitment had a mediating effect on the relationship between workplace spirituality and employee engagement, with the  $\beta$  value of 0.162 and the R-square of 72.3%. The results suggest that the implementation of workplace spirituality and employee engagement is important for universities to improve the performance of their lecturers.

## Keywords

spirituality, meaningfulness, commitment, teaching, engagement

## JEL Classification

J24, J53

## INTRODUCTION

Today, organizations pay great attention to issues of spirituality in the workplace and employee engagement in business (Baskar & Indradevi, 2020; Ke et al., 2017). Hills and Smith (2010) mentioned that the number of employees looking for the meaning and experience of workplace spirituality has increased, while modern organizations attempt to discover ways to enhance employee engagement. Study of Saks (2011) have explained that there is a link between workplace spirituality and employee engagement, based on many research results; however, it is stated that research on these two variables is still limited, and only one is discussed independently of the other.

Employee engagement (EE) has received much attention in the business world, as well as in the society of human resource management (HRM) practitioners. The concept has been mentioned as a new method in HRM where companies can overcome ambiguous and unstable industrial conditions (Lee, 2012). Although this concept is very popular and useful for implementation in organizations, it has been reported that the practice is declining and employee disengagement has been described (Bates, 2004; Richman, 2006). Therefore, the need to promote EE in the workplace is a must and is key for organizational success now-

adays. Employee engagement is influenced by several factors, such as communication within a company, leadership style, company reputation, and corporate culture (Yadnyawati, 2012). A strong organizational culture has a major impact on employee behavior and results in engagement (Robbins & Judge, 2017; Yadnyawati, 2012), and, according to Kreitner and Kinicki (2010), the basis is the organizational value. Values describe the major principles in the organizational culture, which all employees are aware of, accept, and integrate into their every behavior and decision. Consequently, the concept of these values that has been earlier discussed in working environment is known as workplace spirituality. Robbins and Judge (2017) define this as the awareness of people that have an inner life that grows, which is cultivated by a job that is meaningful, and which happens in a community context. Although it is not connected to religion and does not discuss people with certain belief systems (Cavanagh, 1999; Laabs, 1995), spirituality provides values that can be understood and shared. Hence, these shared values create organizational value and is embedded in workplace spirituality. However, related studies are mostly conducted in Western countries, and research in the context of Asia, especially for Indonesia's background is lacking.

Many organizations use employee engagement as an indicator to evaluate behavior and improve performance, and this is also applicable in education, especially in higher studies in the university environment. Universities pay great attention to improving the work behavior of lecturers regarding innovative lecturing and researching activities, which, in turn, enhances an organization's performance. Therefore, the focus of this study is on university lecturers because these respondents represent groups that are linked to the human spirit when relationships with students are fostered and, thus, require workplace spirituality. Conversely, lecturers have high demands of professional ethics in performing their roles and responsibilities in the university and community and are required to devote themselves to the exploration of truth by the academic field.

Given the fact that EE has been described as employees' physical, emotional, and cognitive connection with their work and represented by a dedicated, energetic, and high-performing employee (Bakker & Leiter, 2010), Saks (2011) developed a model of WPS and EE. It is expected that workplace spirituality (WPS) practice will influence lecturers' engagement in teaching and conducting research. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to provide evidence and inspire lecturers and university leaders to foster workplace spirituality that will lead to higher employee engagement.

Furthermore, this study attempted to examine professional commitment as a mediator in the relationship between WPS and EE. According to Setiawan and Prawirasuyasa (2016), the professional commitment of lecturers influences student behavior and, together with organizational culture, it was discovered to affect their learning attitude. This was supported by Harini et al. (2019) who stated that an increase in organizational commitment, along with WLB practices, had an impact on improving lecturers' performance. A study by Çağrı San and Tok (2017) in Turkey with teachers as respondents found that their commitment influenced the formation of three dimensions of employee engagement. Musavi's research (2016) on social workers in Iran produced a similar result, where their professional commitment was shown to be related to engagement behavior. Therefore, it was concluded that engagement is formed from professional commitment possessed by employees, and the results of this study are expected to provide suggestions for both variables.

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## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Workplace spirituality (WPS) is defined as an intense feeling of spiritual connection to something

larger than self, a connectivity with oneself and others for a common purpose, a belief that the work is based on personal values and belief and has a meaning purpose for community (Afsar & Rehman, 2015). WPS is not related to religion, leads people to alter particular belief systems (Rego & Cunha, 2008) and is not ascribed to the

culture of a particular religion. Rather it is based on personal values and theories on how employees perceive themselves spiritually, experience meaningfulness and purpose while working (Ashmos & Dunchon, 2000; Harrington et al., 2001; Milliman et al., 2003). Workplace spirituality encourages a sense of ownership amongst members in an organization because leaders create cultures that provide peace (Karadag, 2009) and increase the capacity of learning (Aydin & Ceylan, 2009). As suggested by Neal and Bennett (2000), WPS has three levels of analysis such as individual, group and organizational. This three-levels analysis was invoked in the three core dimensions in WPS, these are meaningful work (individual level), having a sense of community (group level), and being in alignment with the organization's values and mission (organization level). Moreover, these core dimensions have disclosed certain workplace behaviors, including job satisfaction, turnover intention, citizenship behavior, involvement, and commitment (Margaretha et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the three-level analysis and dimensions used in this study were consistent with Neal and Bennett's (2000) model, and these were the purpose or meaningfulness in one's work, a sense of community, and being in alignment with organizational values and mission. Each represented the three levels that were earlier stated. Furthermore, Pawar (2009) described two perspectives of WPS, which are individual and organizational. The first refers to individual experiences in applying personal spirituality in a company, while the second refers to the organizational value that has been proven with a culture that facilitates individuals to implement spirituality in the workplace (Milliman et al., 2003). Some benefits for an organization that applies WPS are increased productivity and financial advantage. This study used three dimensions of workplace spirituality from Ashmos and Dunchon (2000) that consists of inner life, meaningful work and is connected with the community. Inner life refers to understanding of divine power and how to use it in the real life, and with dimension showing that employees not only have physical, emotional and cognitive necessity, but also have spiritual necessity, and this necessity is brought when they do their work. The second dimension of workplace spirituality is meaningful work, it is related to how job creates happiness, enthusiasm to employees and viewed as impor-

tant in life. Therefore, the expression of spirituality at work claimed that employees want to be involved in work that gives meaning to their lives. The third dimension is condition for community, this dimension discusses on how an employee as a spiritual being lives in a relationship with another employee.

Employee engagement was first developed by Khan (1990, in Ke et al., 2017). It was first implemented by the Gallup research group and has statistically shown a relationship with organizational productivity and profitability, as well as employee welfare and customer satisfaction (Endres & Mancheno-Smoak, 2008). Generally, EE is described as individual contributions, satisfaction, and job passion (Endres & Mancheno-Smoak, 2008). Employee engagement is often explained as the investment of an individual's complete self – cognitive, emotional and physical – into their work role (Rurkkhum, 2010; Whittington et al, 2017); this concept has attracted many business owners, firm consultants, human resource management practitioners, and researchers. Many studies regarding this mindset frequently explain that engaged employees are highly energized and resilient in performing their duties, put their hearts into the jobs, and are persistent and willing to invest efforts. These persons also exhibit strong work involvement, experience feelings of significance, enthusiasm, passion, inspiration, pride, excitement, and challenge from work, and fully concentrate and immerse themselves without noticing the passage of time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Several studies (i.e., Bates, 2004; Richman, 2006; Schaufeli, 2012; Whittington et al, 2017) have proven that EE predicts employee work results, business-unit performance (i.e., customer satisfaction and loyalty), financial performance of an organization, along with positive job-related attitudes (i.e., extra-role behavior, job satisfaction, commitment, and well-being).

Konrad (2006) noted that EE has three relationship components, which are the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects. The first includes employees' beliefs about the organization, as well as the conditions of their leaders and the work environment. The emotional aspect relates their feelings concerning each factor, along with the possession of positive or negative attitudes towards the organ-

ization and the leaders. The behavioral equivalent is a value-added component to the company and consists of efforts for freedom of choice for engaged employees. These persons were brought to their jobs over time and devote strength and intellect to tasks and the company. In a study conducted by Saks (2006), different meanings were found for work or job and organizational engagement. Also, EE is distinct from other organizational behavior concepts, such as job involvement, citizenship, and commitment (Margaretha et al., 2018).

This study aims to empirically examine the impact of workplace spirituality of lecturers in Indonesia toward employee engagement and to test a mediation effect of professional commitment in explaining the relationship between workplace spirituality and employee engagement. This study is based on a prior research model developed by Ke et al. (2017). However, this study measured workplace spirituality using dimensions developed by Ashmos and Dunchon (2000). This makes this study distinct from previous research.

Therefore, the following hypotheses are considered:

- H1: There is a positive relationship between workplace spirituality and employee engagement.*
- H2: There is a positive relationship between workplace spirituality and professional commitment.*
- H3: There is a positive relationship between professional commitment and employee engagement.*
- H4: Professional commitment is a mediating variable in the relationship between workplace spirituality and employee engagement.*

The explanation for each hypothesis is as follows.

Previous studies on WPS and EE were initially performed in western countries such as Europe and the United States. Then, research related to these variables for Asia was conducted by Ke et al. (2017) in China. It was found that WPS is heartfelt and experienced by employees when values in work, groups, and organizations are described and combined, and is

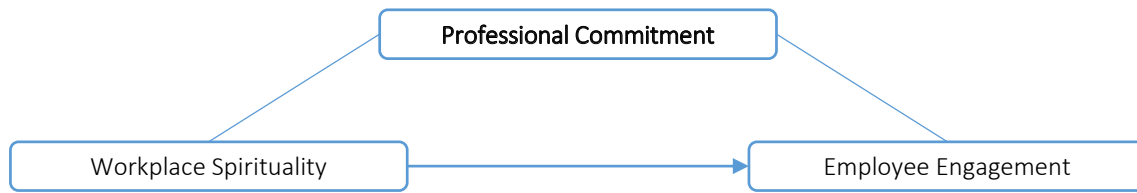
known as employee engagement. According to Schaufeli et al. (2012) and Kahn (1990), engagement is a work-related mental state of working that reflects how committed is an employee to their role cognitively, emotionally and physically. Whittington et al. (2017) explained that EE contains many forms of work experience, including physical, cognitive, and emotional, and gives meaning when employees perform their job roles. Meanwhile, those that possess high spiritual power show a greater tendency to find important job roles. Furthermore, previous studies have consistently shown that WPS is positively associated with employee engagement (i.e., Richman, 2006; Sack, 2011; Schaufeli, 2012; Whittington et al., 2017). In addition, some research also mentioned that EE is one of behavior's dimension that affects work performance (Shuck et al., 2011; Schaufeli, 2012).

From this explanation, a hypothesis was proposed:

- H1: There is a positive relationship between workplace spirituality and employee engagement.*

WPS refers to a condition that focuses on connection at workplace, ultimate purpose in life and personal values and belief that has a meaning purpose for community (Afsar & Rehman, 2015). WPS enables employees to exhibit their competence and fulfillment as intrinsic self-awareness (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Therefore, WPS will promote employees' quality of work and gives positive and meaningful experiences at work. Employees tend to work actively, have a better sense of community, and are willing to engage with daily tasks and responsibilities (Milliman et al., 2003; Schaufeli, 2012; Sharma & Kurma, 2020).

WPS practices have also been shown as a predictor of employees' willingness to maintain and accept the values of his/her chosen careers (Ballout, 2009). This is called a high commitment to the profession. An employee with a higher level of professional commitment tends to demonstrate positive behaviors, such as engagement in organizational activities, willingness to work extra to achieve goals, improved work performance, higher commitment at both organizational and professional levels (Deepak, 2016). Ke et al. (2017)



**Figure 1.** The relationship between workplace spirituality, employee engagement and professional commitment

mentioned that individuals that possessed high WPS were discovered to believe that their job was meaningful, showed it in the work environment, and became more professionally enthusiastic. Furthermore, the other aim of the study is to see professional commitment as a mediating effect in the relationship between WPS and EE. From this explanation, several hypotheses were proposed:

- H2: *There is a positive relationship between workplace spirituality and professional commitment.*
- H3: *There is a positive relationship between professional commitment and employee engagement.*
- H4: *Professional commitment is a mediating variable in the relationship between workplace spirituality and employee engagement.*

## 2. METHOD

In contrast to the prior research conducted by Ke et al. (2017), this study adopted a workplace spirituality questionnaire from Ashmos and Dunchon (2000). WPS questionnaire consists of 21 items, an example of the item such as “My spirit is energized by my work”. Meanwhile, employee engagement was measured using Schaufeli et al.’s (2006) 17-item measure. A sample item is “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”. Professional commitment was assessed using Meyer and Allen’s (1991) 12-item professional commitment scale. A sample item is “I am very happy being a member of this organization”.

The sample consisted of 322 lecturers from state and private universities in Indonesia, and the data was collected via questionnaires that were dis-

tributed directly, through post or mail, or online. Data was analyzed by testing the validity, reliability, and path analysis. The tests were performed to identify the relationship and influence between workplace spirituality, employee engagement, and professional commitment.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic description in Table 1 illustrates general information, such as gender, age, marital status, job tenure, educational and university status, to comprehend the type of respondents in this study. Consequently, the results showed that most of the participants comprised 208 females, and 105 respondents were in the age range of 34 to 44 years, both of which accounted for 64.4% and 32.6%, respectively. Also, 42 respondents were reported to be single, while 280 were married, and both groups comprised 13% and 87%. Based on educational status, 197 participants, who represented the majority at a proportion of 61.2%, had master’s degrees.

The confirmatory factor analysis was used in this study according to underlying theories, where Hair et al. (2010) had mentioned that a construct was valid if the factor loading was above 0.40. Subsequently, the analysis results of the three constructs yielded loading factors between 0.451 and 0.829 for the items in question. The reliability values for workplace spirituality were 0.916 and 0.950 for employee engagement, and 0.854 for professional commitment. Table 2 shows the factor loading and Cronbach’s alpha (CA) for each variable, and these were said to be reliable when CA value > 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). This table also outlined the validity and reliability test results for each variable used in the study.

**Table 1.** Respondents' profile

Source: Data processed.

Dimension	Category	Number of respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	114	35.6%
	Female	208	64.4%
Age	25-34 years	47	14.6%
	35-44 years	105	32.6%
	45-54 years	98	30.4%
	54-64 years	66	20.5%
	> 64 years	6	1.9%
	Marital status	Single	42
	Married	280	87%
Educational status	Bachelor's degree	7	2.2%
	Master's degree	197	61.2%
	Doctoral degree	118	36.6%
Job tenure	1-5 years	44	13.7%
	6-10 years	64	19.9%
	11-15 years	53	16.5%
	16-20	59	18.3%
	> 20 years	102	31.7%
University status	State university	69	21.4%
	Private university	253	78.6%

**Table 2.** Validity and reliability test results

Source: Data processed.

Items	Component		
	1	2	3
WPS1		.599	
WPS2		.611	
WPS3		.678	
WPS4		.671	
WPS5		.575	
WPS6		.487	
WPS7		.743	
WPS8		.680	
WPS9		.544	
WPS10		.697	
WPS11		.600	
WPS12		.631	
WPS13		.644	
WPS14		.549	
WPS15		.629	
WPS16		.697	
WPS17		.677	
WPS18		.633	
WPS19		.586	
WPS20		.633	
WPS21		.640	
EE1			.721
EE2			.756
EE3			.741
EE4			.818
EE5			.829
EE6			.723
EE7			.790

**Table 2 (cont.).** Validity and reliability test results

Items	Component		
	1	2	3
EE8			.790
EE9			.751
EE10			.776
EE11			.812
EE12			.734
EE13			.743
EE14			.747
EE15			.762
EE16			.687
EE17			.624
PC1	.461		
PC2	.465		
PC3	.462		
PC4	.452		
PC5	.451		
PC6	.450		
PC7	.689		
PC8	.692		
PC9	.693		
PC10	.695		
PC11	.727		
PC12	.734		
PC13	.643		
PC14	.594		
PC15	.722		
CA	.854	.916	.950
N of items	15	21	17

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations among variables

Source: Data processed.

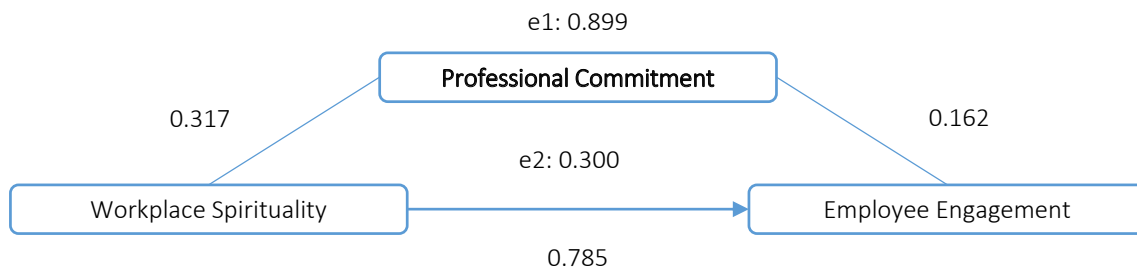
Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Gender	1.65	0.48	1	-0.069	0.041	0.051	-0.017	-0.009	-0.056
Age	2.62	1.025		1	0.045	0.702**	0.017	0.045	-0.130*
University status	1.79	0.41			1	-0.022	0.004	0.018	-0.014
Job tenure	3.35	1.44				1	0.156	0.147	-0.039
WPS	89.52	9.62					1	0.836	0.317
EE	71.23	9.25						1	0.411**
PC	49.29	8.79							1

**Table 4.** Hypothesis testing results

Source: Data processed.

Path	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	β	p-value	Conclusion
WPS → EE	0.700	0.699	0.836	0.000	Supported
WPS → PC	0.101	0.098	0.317	0.000	Supported
PC → EE	0.169	0.166	0.411	0.000	Supported
WPS → PC → EE	0.723	0.721	0.162	0.000	Supported





**Figure 2.** Mediation model of workplace spirituality and employee engagement using professional commitment as a mediating variable

The effects of the two variables on employee engagement were tested, and Table 4 shows positive relationships. The results for workplace spirituality were  $\beta = 0.836$ ,  $\rho = 0.000$ , professional commitment yielded  $\beta = 0.461$ ,  $\rho = 0.000$ , while the  $R$ -square was 70%. Therefore, workplace spirituality had a direct effect on employee engagement, and this supported  $H1$  and  $H3$ ; these findings were consistent with previous studies (Baskar & Indradevi, 2020; Ke et al. 2017; Mariani et al., 2020).

Subsequently, the relationship between WPS and PC was examined and outcomes of  $\beta = 0.317$ ,  $\rho = 0.000$  were revealed, thus supporting  $H2$ . For the last hypothesis, the mediating effect of professional commitment on the relationship between workplace spirituality and job engagement was evaluated and shown in Table 4. The indirect effect of professional commitment at  $\beta = 0.162$ ,  $\rho = 0.000$  on employee engagement was significant, hence,  $H4$  was supported. These findings were all consistent with prior studies (Ke et al., 2017).

The results of this study show that there is a relationship between workplace spirituality and em-

ployee engagement, and these findings supported the earlier study by Ke et al. (2017). According to Milliman et al. (2003), WPS involves a sense of wholeness, and this is similar to employee engagement, which also involves completeness. It is important to be a whole and integrated individual (Pfeffer, 2010), and when these characteristics are supported by an organization, employees may become more productive. In this study, the respondents were lecturers from private and state universities in Indonesia. They constituted a special group that faced immense pressure during lecturing, researching, interpersonal relationships, and others. Meanwhile, some companies use engagement as an indicator to evaluate and appraise employees' behavior to promote company performance, and recently, many universities have shown increased attention to scientific research on innovative behaviors. The WPS of lecturers influenced their engagement, and this eventually affected research and organizational performance. Therefore, this study proved that the campus strengthens the WPS and EE of lecturers from the aspects of meaningful work and organizational values.

## CONCLUSION

This study discusses the relationship between WPS and EE of the university lecturers and explores the mediating effect of professional commitment on the relationship between WPS and EE. The result shows there is a relationship between WPS and EE, and professional commitment has a mediating effect on the relationship between the two variables. Based on the results of the study, it encourages leaders in universities to notice the psychology of lecturers, promote their motivation, and strengthen their professional commitments, to facilitate an increase in university performance in all areas such as research, academia, and community development. Finally, the implementation of workplace spirituality will stimulate the university to enhance their communication and level of trust in lecturers, therefore, job satisfaction and sense of belonging will increase. This will also shorten the turnover intention rate and certainly improve their contribution to the university.

Moreover, this study adds empirical evidence to explain the multidimensional relationship between WPS and EE. Furthermore, reality studies regarding the impact of workplace spirituality are mostly conducted in Western Countries, while little evidence has been provided for the Indonesian background. Therefore, this study could be one of the references regarding workplace spirituality and employee engagement in the Indonesian context.

This study has some limitations, which include the need to upgrade research methods by using other techniques, as well as accepted scales established in foreign countries. Therefore, translating questionnaires from English to Indonesian may lead to inconsistencies in results due to cultural differences. Furthermore, this study mostly used only an online survey method in distributing questionnaires due to the COVID-19 pandemic in modern work environments. This caused a low response rate, which made it impossible to generalize the study outcomes, so it is better to add other methods to improve the representativeness of the sample and to simplify the answers to the survey questionnaire. For future research, a cultural scale should be embraced to increase the reliability of research results.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Meily Marpaung.

Data curation: Meily Marpaung, Susanti Saragih, Sri Zaniarti.

Formal analysis: Meily Marpaung.

Investigation: Meily Marpaung, Susanti Saragih, Sri Zaniarti.

Methodology: Meily Marpaung, Susanti Saragih.

Project administration: Susanti Saragih, Sri Zaniarti, Bena Parayow.

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Supervision: Meily Marpaung.

Writing – original draft: Meily Marpaung.

Writing – review & editing: Meily Marpaung, Susanti Saragih, Sri Zaniarti, Bena Parayow.

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