

## Spiritual leadership and job burnout: Mediating effects of employee well-being and life satisfaction

William D. Hunsaker<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Associate Professor, School of Business Administration, Kyungpook National University, 80 Daehak-Ro, Buk-Gu, Daegu, 41566, South Korea

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### ABSTRACT

Life satisfaction is an emerging intervening mechanism to explain the effect of work experiences on organizational performance. However, the mechanism has been largely ignored in the management field. The results of this study increase our understanding of how an organizational culture that embraces spiritual leadership and engages the spiritual well-being and life satisfaction needs of employees can help alleviate the symptoms of job burnout. The purpose of this study was to examine how life satisfaction, working in combination with spiritual well-being, influences the relationship between spiritual leadership and job burnout. This study was an explanatory research exploration of the causal relationship between spiritual leadership and job burnout. Research results confirmed that supervisory support, as measured through spiritual leadership, inversely influenced job burnout, as measured through worker exhaustion. Additionally, results revealed that the intervening, serial effect of spiritual well-being and life satisfaction on job burnout was significant. Moreover, results revealed that employees' life satisfaction fully mediated the relationship with employee vigor while partially mediating that with employee exhaustion.

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## 1. Introduction

The management field has largely overlooked the concept of life satisfaction, defined as a cognitive, judgment of the quality of one's life (Diener et al., 1985), although it is a potential mechanism to explain how work experiences guide employee behaviors that influence organizational performance (Erdogan et al., 2012). Research has shown that life satisfaction is directly linked with employees' subjective well-being and individual happiness (Diener, 1984; Rice, 1984), characterized by individuals who are comfortable taking risks, more open-minded, and more creative (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). In contrast, research has also shown an inverse correlation between life satisfaction and employee attitudes that hinder the organizational performance, such as job avoidance, turnover, absenteeism, and job burnout (Demerouti et al., 2000; Judge & Locke, 1993; Lee et al., 2004; Shaw & Gupta, 2001; Wu et al., 2017).

\* Corresponding author.  
E-mail address: [hunsaker@knu.ac.kr](mailto:hunsaker@knu.ac.kr) (W. D. Hunsaker)

Job burnout, and its opposing attitude, job engagement, continue to capture researchers' interest (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Schaufeli et al., 2002), as organizations struggle to meet competitive pressures such as downsizing and automation, which has led to job burnout concerns due to job stress and excessive work hours (Fry & Cohen, 2009; Maslach et al., 2001). Research has shown that job burnout due to employee exhaustion and disengagement with work leads to higher turnover and absenteeism, as well as a lower sense of job and life satisfaction (Babakus et al., 2010; Demerouti & Bakker, 2008; Demerouti et al., 2000; Maslach et al., 2001; Rothmann, 2008). Notably, excessive job demands and insufficient job resources have been shown to evoke the work stressors that prompt the onset of job burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). To counter this damaging process, research has shown that supervisor support, value-based leadership, and an organizational environment embracing a sense of community and fairness can inversely affect job burnout by stabilizing exhaustion and disengagement (Gill et al., 2006; Laschinger et al., 2012; Seltzer & Numerof, 1988; Yang & Fry, 2018). This paper posits that spiritual leadership can inversely influence job burnout through the central themes of community, meaning, and value alignment embedded in spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003).

Spiritual leadership is an emerging, value-based approach to leadership that assumes that the interactions between leaders and followers are a critical building block for an organizational culture of mutually aligned values that enables workers to better achieve a sense of spiritual well-being or meaningfulness in and at work (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013; Saks, 2011). Research has shown that the triggering mechanism of spiritual leadership is rooted in the positive spillover effects of one's spiritual well-being on organizational and individual outcomes, including organizational commitment, productivity, organizational citizenship behavior, job burnout, and life satisfaction (Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2005; Hunsaker, 2016; Yang & Fry, 2018; Wilensky, 1960). In expanding the scope of spiritual leadership research, this paper postulates that the spillover effects of one's spiritual well-being positively influence one's life satisfaction, which in turn inversely mediates the relationship with job burnout.

To summarize, the purpose of this research is to expand our understanding of the effects of life satisfaction in the management field by examining life satisfaction as an intervening mechanism in the relationship between spiritual leadership and job burnout. This should not only expand the scope of life satisfaction research but also help us better understand the role of leadership practices and employee well-being in countering job burnout.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypotheses**

### *2.1 Job burnout*

Burnout is considered as a reaction to occupational stress, generally characterized by three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy, which comprise the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et al., 1996). Emotional exhaustion is considered the core stress element of burnout, resulting from resource depletion and feelings of overextension that overwhelm personal abilities, while cynicism refers to negative attitudes and feelings about one's clients and professional efficacy relates to a lack of achievement or productivity in one's work (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Maslach et al., 1996). Demerouti and Bakker (2008) suggested an alternative operationalization of burnout framed along two dimensions: exhaustion and disengagement. Within this model, the characterization of exhaustion expands beyond the affective component of work stress to also include physical and cognitive components, and disengagement expands beyond negative attitudes toward clients to include detachment from the object and content of one's work. Moreover, the model assumes that job burnout of any employee, irrespective of occupation type, can be measured beyond the existing focus on human service occupations. Framed within positive psychology research from the early 2000s, burnout researchers began investigating the concept of job engagement, the opposing dimension of job burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2002), which has consequently led to research models examining the effects of engagement on the well-being and life satisfaction of workers (Robertson & Cooper, 2010; Rothmann, 2008). While initial research merely

focused on reverse coding of burnout measurement items, current researchers increasingly recognize the greater validity of using independent measurements of engagement (Demerouti et al., 2010; Gonzales-Roma et al., 2006). Notably, the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) for measuring burnout (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008) includes both positively and negatively worded items to evaluate the dimensions of exhaustion and disengagement, which allows burnout to be interpreted in terms of both burnout and engagement. For example, burnout can be measured on a continuum from exhaustion to vigor (i.e., the energy continuum) and from disengagement to dedication (i.e., the identification continuum).

The effects of burnout have been linked to positive job performance, health, and one's well-being, as well as negative behaviors that diminish performance such as absenteeism, turnover, lower productivity, decreased job satisfaction, interpersonal conflict, and decreased life satisfaction (Demerouti et al., 2000; Maslach et al., 2001). For instance, Babakus et al. (2010) determined that burnout significantly influenced employee turnover intentions, helped by leadership behavior inversely influencing burnout. Demerouti et al. (2000) found that job burnout through workers' exhaustion and disengagement negatively mediated workers' sense of life satisfaction due to excessive job demands and lack of job resources. Meanwhile, Rothmann (2008) examined a four-factor model of work-related well-being and determined that burnout (i.e., exhaustion and cynicism) and occupational stress (i.e., job demands and lack of resources) were significantly correlated and both inversely related to well-being. The underlying antecedents of burnout can be found not only in demographic and personality characteristics but more importantly through diverse job and organizational characteristics, namely, working conditions that evoke work stressors (Maslach et al., 2001). Work stressors are related to job demands and/or insufficient job resources, such as work overload, excessive work hours, lack of supervisor or social support, lack of feedback, and an overall organizational environment that elicits a weak sense of community or sense of fairness (Demerouti et al., 2000; Maslach et al., 2001; Robertson & Cooper, 2010). Seltzer and Numerof (1988) were the first to conduct an empirical study on the effects of leadership on burnout; they determined that supervisory leadership can inversely affect job burnout through the dimension of leadership consideration. Recent research findings have confirmed the inverse relationship between burnout and various leadership types including transformational leadership (Gill et al., 2006), authentic leadership (Laschinger et al., 2012), servant leadership (Babakus et al., 2010), and spiritual leadership (Yang & Fry, 2018). This paper also examined the effects of spiritual leadership on burnout; however, unlike previous leadership studies that focused on human service samples, such as health, hotel, or customer services, this study focused on a general population sample of white- and blue-collar workers to extend the scope of burnout research beyond human service organizations (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008).

## *2.2 Spiritual leadership*

Spiritual leadership is a value-based, holistic approach to leadership based on the social interactions between leaders, followers, and coworkers, which facilitate creating and sustaining an organizational culture that positively influences organizational performance and effectiveness (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013). This approach captures the attitudes, needs, and intrinsic motivations of organizational participants that contribute to both individual and organizational effectiveness (Fry, 2003; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013). Based on this approach, research has demonstrated that spiritual leadership positively influences organizational commitment and productivity (Fry et al., 2005; Jeon et al., 2013), job satisfaction (Bodla & Ali, 2012), organizational citizenship behavior (Chen & Yang, 2012; Hunsaker, 2016), and life satisfaction (Yang & Fry, 2018), and more recent research has shown that spiritual leadership can mitigate the negative effects of job burnout (Yang & Fry, 2018) and counterproductive work behavior (Hunsaker & Nam, 2017). Spiritual leadership is embedded in the broad construct of workplace spirituality, characterized by three key dimensions: meaningful and interesting work, a sense of connection with others, and mutually aligned individual and organizational values (Fry, 2003; Milliman et al., 2003; Pfeffer, 2010). As defined by Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003), workplace spirituality is "a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected in a way that provides feelings of compassion and joy"

(p.13). This suggests that the alignment of interwoven organizational and individual values underpins workplace spirituality (and by extension, spiritual leadership) and creates the foundation for a sense of purpose or calling through meaningful work and a sense of membership through connection with others (Benefiel et al., 2014), which Fry and Nisiewicz (2013) define as an individual's spiritual well-being. Hence, spiritual leadership can be viewed as a process (Fry, 2003; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013) that commences with the interaction of intrinsic motivators and mutually aligned values between leaders, followers, and coworkers embedded within the organizational culture, called spiritual leadership and operationalized as altruistic love, hope/faith, and vision within Fry's (2003) model. In turn, the interactive process of spiritual leadership enhances organizational participants' sense of spiritual well-being, operationalized as meaning and membership, which then influences organizational and individual effectiveness.

Spiritual well-being is a crucial intervening mechanism in the spiritual leadership process. According to Fry (2003), two assumptions influence this process: first, a mutually shared vision that sparks a sense of purpose and belief that one can make a difference, and second, an organizational culture founded on values such as integrity and compassion that sparks feelings of being understood and appreciated. Spillover and social exchange theories explain the enhancing effects of spiritual leadership on spiritual well-being and organizational outcomes, wherein the social exchange between leaders and followers enhances individuals' sense of purpose, meaning, and belonging within the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Fry, 2003; Wilensky, 1960). Subsequently, organizational and individual outcomes are more easily realized through the positive spillover effects of enhanced spiritual well-being. In conclusion, this paper posited that spiritual leadership would negatively influence the exhaustion dimension of job burnout while positively influencing the opposing vigor dimension of job engagement through the intervening spillover effects of employees' sense of spiritual well-being on job burnout.

H<sub>1</sub>: Spiritual leadership exhibits a negative, inverse relationship on the exhaustion component of job burnout and a positive relationship with the vigor component of job engagement through spiritual well-being variables.

### *2.3 Life satisfaction*

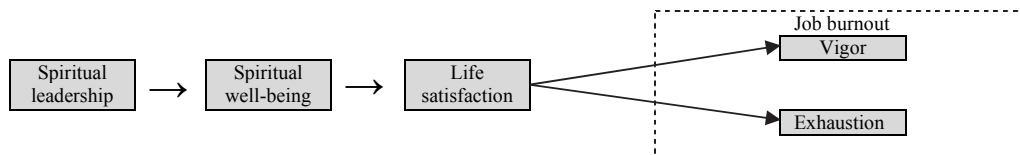
Life satisfaction refers to a cognitive assessment of the perceived quality of one's life in terms of individual wants and needs being satisfied or satisfaction with life circumstances in general (Diener et al., 1985; Rice, 1984). Life satisfaction is a core component and indicator of subjective well-being as well as an indicator of individual happiness (Diener, 1984). However, while the management field has endorsed the influence of employee well-being on organizational performance and effectiveness (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009), the concept of life satisfaction has mostly been ignored (Erdogan et al., 2012). Indeed, according to Erdogan et al. (2012), life satisfaction can be viewed as a function of not only the individual but of one's work domain, suggesting that leadership theories can broaden the field of life satisfaction "as a potential mechanism through which one's experiences at work are translated into employee behaviors" (p. 1040) that influence organizational performance. Within the work domain, life satisfaction is influenced through needs satisfaction (i.e., financial and interpersonal needs) and mindful activities (i.e., growth, challenge, and meaning at work; Erdogan et al., 2012). Underpinning this relationship is spillover theory, which posits that the relationships between life domains can be influenced through spillover effects from one domain to another (Wilensky, 1960). For example, research has identified a correlation between the interpersonal needs of workers that are satisfied through social support systems at work (i.e., organization, supervisors, and coworkers) and workers' life satisfaction, suggesting a supportive work environment influences life satisfaction (Michel et al., 2009). Recently, Yang and Fry (2018) found that spiritual leadership combined with the mediating effects of spiritual well-being positively influenced life satisfaction, confirming that mindful activities within the work domain are related to life satisfaction. This paper posited that the social exchanges between leaders, followers, and coworkers within the context of spiritual leadership satisfy workers' interpersonal needs and mindful activities, which influences their well-being and life satisfaction.

H<sub>2</sub>: Spiritual well-being variables mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and life satisfaction.

The effect of life satisfaction on organizational outcomes is an understudied research area (Erdogan et al., 2012), although researchers have identified a statistically significant relationship between life satisfaction and job performance aspects such as organizational citizenship behavior (Jones, 2006). In contrast, and as pertains to this study, research has revealed negative correlations between life satisfaction and job avoidance (Judge & Locke, 1993), turnover intention (Wu et al., 2017), absenteeism and turnover (Shaw & Gupta, 2001), and job burnout (Chan, 2011; Demerouti et al., 2000; Lee et al., 2004). Demerouti et al. (2000) found that burnout dimensions mediated the relationship between job resources/demands and life satisfaction, suggesting that job resources such as supervisor support affect workers' quality of life, which can be negatively influenced by job burnout. Lee et al. (2004) determined that burnout was a negative predictor of life satisfaction among nurses in Korea, and Chan (2011) found a strong negative correlation between life satisfaction and burnout among teachers in Hong Kong, with an especially high negative association between emotional exhaustion and life satisfaction. In summary, as shown above, existing research has generally approached life satisfaction as an outcome of job burnout. In contrast, based on the strong correlations between job burnout and life satisfaction, this study examines life satisfaction as an intervening mechanism in mitigating the negative effects of job burnout, backed by organizational cultures that embrace spiritual leadership. Indeed, Fry and Cohen (2009) proposed that spiritual leadership is necessary for transforming the extended work hour cultures that are characterized by exhaustion and workaholism. Therefore, spiritual leadership is posited to enable organizational and management cultures that provides job resources that enhance employee well-being, which should then enhance employee life satisfaction, which will in turn spill over and help employees manage burnout or exhaustion effects.

H<sub>3</sub>: Life satisfaction mediates the relationship between spiritual well-being variables and job burnout (exhaustion) and job engagement (vigor).

H<sub>4</sub>: Spiritual well-being and life satisfaction sequentially mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and employee exhaustion and vigor.



**Fig. 1.** Conceptual framework

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Sample and data collection

According to OECD employment outlook data in 2017, the average annual hours worked per employee in Korea was 2024, ranking Korea the third most active among the OECD countries (compared with Japan's 1710 hours and 1780 hours in the United States). In the survey data for this study, participants claimed to work an average of 9.4 hours per day, which adjusted for average holidays and paid vacation equates to approximately 2100 hours of annual labor. Why the excessive hours are compared with other OECD nations? In addition to technology trends and human resource practices that create extended work hour cultures (Fry & Cohen, 2009), the underlying cultural and Confucian values, attitudes, and traditions that heavily influence and permeate Korea's organizational life provide another plausible explanation (Cho & Yoon, 2001). The acceleration of modernity in Korea since the 1980s has reduced the hold of

traditional Confucian values, replaced by Western attitudes and behaviors (Bell & Hahm, 2003). However, organizational culture in Korea has generally sustained a strong Confucian focus on maintaining harmony and striving for social order through reciprocal, relational obligations and loyalty between leaders, followers, and coworkers (Paik & Sohn, 1998). Underpinned by this sense of loyalty and collectivism, workers have been expected to achieve aggressive productivity and performance targets even despite organizational downsizing, which has led to not only extended work hours but, implicitly, higher job demands and decreased access to job resources as well (Hemmert, 2012; Yu & Rowley, 2009). On one hand, the result of this conflict between modernity and traditional values has been an increase in individualism, helped by human resource practices that recognize and reward personal ambitions and individual performance, which has led to extended work hours in the pursuit of personal ambitions (Bae et al., 2011; Han & Shin, 2000). On the other hand, the deeply embedded hold of traditional values within organizations has led employees to maintain extended work hours out of a sense of duty and loyalty to leaders and the organization in sustaining harmony (Hemmert, 2012).

This study followed a multi-sample approach consisting of white- and blue-collar workers in both the manufacturing and service sectors in Korea. Surveys were distributed to approximately 600 employees, of whom 375 submitted completed questionnaires that were deemed usable. Fifty-nine percent of participants were male, 71% of participants were under the age of 40, 70% had at least a college degree, average work experience was 8 years, 51% were married, 30% were associated with organized religion, and 10% were managers. Additionally, 14% of participants worked in sales, 23% worked in research/training, 16% worked in production, and 47% worked in administrative functions.

### 3.2 Measures

Instrumentation for spiritual leadership and spiritual well-being was based on five dimensions and 21 items from Fry's (2008) survey of spiritual leadership: vision, hope/faith, altruistic love, meaning, and membership. The high inter-correlations of the three dimensions of spiritual leadership and two dimensions of spiritual well-being have been shown to form the composite, higher-order, latent dimensions of spiritual leadership (Fry et al., 2005) and spiritual well-being (Chen et al., 2012) that were validated in this study and used for analyzing the proposed structural model. Instrument reliabilities for these two composite dimensions were .94 and .87, respectively. Life satisfaction and job burnout were measured using four items adapted from Diener's (1984) life satisfaction instrument and eight items of the exhaustion dimension from the OLBI burnout instrument (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed two reliable latent factors on the energy continuum of the burnout instrument, labeled vigor and exhaustion used for subsequent hypothesis testing. Instrument reliability of life satisfaction was .83, vigor was .70, and exhaustion was .79, respectively.

## 4. Analyses and Results

The descriptive statistics of this study—means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability coefficients—are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Descriptive statistics and correlations ( $N = 375$ )

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 Spiritual leadership	3.32	.66	<b>.94</b>				
2 Spiritual well-being	3.50	.61	.65	<b>.87</b>			
3 Life satisfaction	3.37	.65	.52	.59	<b>.83</b>		
4 Exhaustion	3.32	.74	-.38	-.33	-.33	<b>.79</b>	
5 Vigor	3.56	.55	.36	.43	.53	.38	<b>.70</b>

Note. All correlations were significant at  $p < 0.01$ . Scale reliabilities are on the diagonal in boldface.

All measures correlated with each other, ranging from  $-.33$  to  $.65$ , and were consistent with hypothesized relationships; moreover, the reliability of all measures was acceptable, ranging between  $.70$  and  $.94$ . In

support of  $H_1$ , spiritual leadership was correlated negatively with the exhaustion component of job burnout ( $r = -.38, p < .01$ ). Structural equation modeling through AMOS was used to examine model fit and test hypothesized relationships. CFA was used to examine the validity of this study before the proposed hypotheses were tested. The fit of the proposed model was assessed based on well-established goodness-of-fit indices:  $\chi^2$  test of significance, comparative fit index (CFI), non-normed fit index (NNFI), and root-mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The hypothesized five-factor model with spiritual leadership and spiritual well-being as second-order factors and job burnout separated into vigor and exhaustion factors revealed adequate fit across all measures:  $\chi^2 = 869.346, df = 417, CFI = .934, NNFI = .927, RMSEA = .054$ . Structural equation modeling based on the maximum likelihood estimation was used to examine the structural fit of the hypothesized model of spiritual leadership, and the fit surpassed acceptable thresholds in support of the model:  $\chi^2 = 888.316, df = 422, CFI = .932, NNFI = .925, RMSEA = .054$ . Alternative models were examined to assess the possibility of a model with better fit, as shown in Table 2. Model 2 was tested by removing both intervening variables, resulted in improved overall fit of the data, although the explained variance of vigor fell considerably. Models 3 and 4 tested the fit of the model upon removing either spiritual well-being or life satisfaction as an intervening variable, which also revealed improved fit relative to hypothesized model 1, although the explained variance of the burnout variables was lower.

Finally, model 5 tested the effect of adding direct paths from spiritual leadership to the burnout variables, based on modification suggestions within AMOS, which resulted in both improved overall fit of the data and also the highest levels of explained variance for the burnout variables ( $\chi^2 = 871.085, df = 420, CFI = .935, NNFI = .927, RMSEA = .054$ ); therefore, among the alternative models tested, model 5 was deemed the best fit and measure for this study. Standardized direct effect path estimates are shown in Fig. 2, along with squared multiple correlations as indicators of explained variance. In confirming this conclusion, a Chi-Square difference test was applied to examine whether the differences in model fit between the hypothesized model and model 5 were significant, and the results showed that the differences were not significant: The two models explained the data similarly (Schermelele-Engel et al., 2003). Considering the slightly better fit and explained variance of model 5, and the theoretical soundness of the idea that leadership directly influences job burnout and engagement (Gill et al., 2006; Laschinger et al., 2012), model 5 was used for subsequent hypothesis testing.

**Table 2**

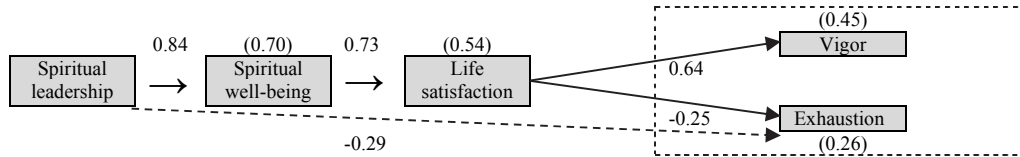
Alternative structural models

	Path	CFI	NNFI	RMSEA	Explained variance ( $R^2$ )	
					Exhaustion	Vigor
Model 1*	SL→SWB→LS→V/E	.932	.925	.054	.22	.45
Model 2	SL→V/E	.961	.954	.052	.22	.19
Model 3	SL→SWB→V/E	.941	.934	.055	.26	.27
Model 4	SL→LS→V/E	.945	.938	.055	.22	.45
Model 5	SL→SWB→LS→V/E (w/SL→V/E)	.935	.927	.054	.26	.45

Note: \*signifies original hypothesis; SL = spiritual leadership, SWB = spiritual wellbeing, LS = life satisfaction, V/E = vigor and exhaustion

Hypotheses were assessed through path analysis of the structural model and mediation testing guidelines. In support of  $H_1$ , the direct path coefficient from spiritual leadership to exhaustion was negative ( $\beta = -.38, p < .01$ ) and to vigor was positive ( $\beta = .36, p < .01$ ), excluding the intervening effects of spiritual well-being and life satisfaction.  $H_2$  proposed that spiritual well-being would mediate the relationship between spiritual leadership and life satisfaction. Mediation testing followed guidelines posited by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Preacher and Hayes (2004), which entail examining the path significance of direct and indirect effects on outcome variables. As needed, the indirect path relationships in this study were also tested for significance using bootstrapping with confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). First, as shown in Fig. 2, the path coefficients of this proposed relationship were significant and met hypothesized positive path directions, wherein spiritual leadership positively influenced spiritual well-

being, which in turn positively influenced life satisfaction. Second, the direct and indirect effects of spiritual leadership and spiritual well-being on life satisfaction were examined, and the results were significant ( $p < .01$ ): Spiritual leadership demonstrated a direct effect of .52 ( $p < .01$ ) on life satisfaction that fell to .23 ( $p < .01$ ) when spiritual well-being was added as a mediator with the indirect effect of spiritual well-being being (.27,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting a partial mediating relationship. Hence, H<sub>2</sub> was not fully supported, although the influence of spiritual leadership and spiritual well-being positively influenced employees' sense of life satisfaction.



**Fig. 2.** Simplified results of proposed structural model

*Note:* Dotted paths represent model additions. Data in parentheses represent the proportion of each scale's variance. All path coefficients were significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

Hypothesis 3 proposed that life satisfaction would mediate the relationships between spiritual well-being and job burnout and engagement through the dimensions of exhaustion and vigor. First, as shown in Fig. 2, the path coefficients of this proposed relationship were significant and met hypothesized positive path directions, wherein spiritual well-being positively influenced life satisfaction, which in turn negatively influenced exhaustion and positively influenced vigor. Second, the direct and indirect effects of spiritual leadership, spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction on the dimensions of exhaustion and vigor were examined, and the results were significant, with spiritual well-being demonstrating a negative direct effect of -.33 ( $p < .01$ ) on exhaustion that declined to -.26 ( $p < .01$ ) when life satisfaction was added as a mediator, with the indirect effect of life satisfaction being -.15 ( $p < .01$ ). Spiritual well-being demonstrated a direct effect of .43 ( $p < .01$ ) on vigor that also declined to .16 ( $p < .01$ ), when life satisfaction was added, with an indirect effect of .23 ( $p < .01$ ). The results demonstrated a partial mediating relationship, and thus, H<sub>3</sub> was not fully supported, although spiritual well-being and life satisfaction did positively influence employees' perceived exhaustion and vigor.

Hypothesis 4 proposed a serial mediation of spiritual well-being and life satisfaction in the relationships between spiritual leadership and job burnout and engagement. As shown in Table 3, the direct and indirect effects of the hypothesized path to exhaustion, with both spiritual well-being and life satisfaction operating as serial mediators, correlated directionally, with both the indirect effect of life satisfaction and the serial effect being significant, suggesting that the mediators partially mediated this path relationship. In contrast, the direct effect of the hypothesized path of spiritual leadership to vigor, when both spiritual well-being and life satisfaction were included as serial mediators, declined sharply and lost its significance, while the indirect effects of both mediators and the serial effect were significant, suggesting that the mediators fully mediated this path relationship. Moreover, based on guidelines for testing the indirect effects of mediators proposed by Preacher and Hayes (2004), the indirect effects of spiritual well-being and life satisfaction were tested through bootstrapping (5000 samples) with confidence intervals to test whether or not zero was included in the confidence interval. Supporting H<sub>4</sub>, the serial indirect effect of spiritual well-being and life satisfaction on exhaustion was -.046 (95% C.I. = [-.098, -.008]; S.E. = .023,  $p < .01$ ) and that on vigor was .097 (95% C.I. = [-.151, -.060]; S.E. = .023,  $p < .01$ ) Alternative testing of each mediator variable, acting independently and not in serial, found similar results, with the path relationship from spiritual leadership to exhaustion displaying partial mediation and to vigor displaying full mediation. Hence, H<sub>4</sub> was partially supported.



**Table 3**  
Mediation results

Path	Direct effect of IV		Indirect mediation effects		Serial effect (d)	Total effect (a+b+c+d)
	w/o mediators	w/mediators (a)	SWB (b)	LS (c)		
SL→SWB→LS→Exhaustion	-.429	-.285	-.058*	-.039	-.046	-.429
SL→SWB→LS→Vigor	.362	.037*	.083	.082	.097	.299
SL→SWB→Exhaustion	-.429	-.324	-.104			-.429
SL→SWB→Vigor	.362	.119	.180			.299
SL→LS→Exhaustion	-.429	-.327		-.101		-.429
SL→LS→Vigor	.362	.097**		.202**		.299

Note: All paths significant at  $p < .01$ , except as noted. \*not significant, \*\* $p < .05$ . Serial effect refers to the effect of mediators operating in serial within the regression model. SL = spiritual leadership, SWB = spiritual well-being, LS = life satisfaction

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The current study determined that job resources influence job burnout, in particular confirming that spiritual leadership behaviors can mitigate the negative symptoms of job exhaustion through employees' sense of spiritual well-being, as recently shown by Yang and Fry (2018). The current study is differed from that by Yang and Fry in that the hypothesized relationships in this study were shown to hold in a normal sample population rather than a sample based on human service professions. Moreover, the study determined that beyond employees' sense of spiritual well-being, their life satisfaction played a crucial role in mediating the relationship with job burnout. This study adds to the body of life satisfaction research by showing the intervening effects of life satisfaction on critical organizational outcome behaviors, such as job burnout, which Erdogan et al. (2012) highlighted as a specific area of management research deserving attention. Notably, life satisfaction was directly related to the level of vigor experienced in one's work while at the same time relating inversely to exhaustion as measured with the energy continuum of the OLBI (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008). This finding confirms existing research on the effects of personal resources such as self-efficacy, self-confidence, and now life satisfaction as antecedents of job burnout and engagement (Erdogan et al., 2012).

Erdogan et al. (2012) postulated that work-related needs and mindfulness at work are critical antecedent influences on life satisfaction, and the results of this study confirm that the social and interpersonal needs between leaders, followers, and coworkers in the spiritual leadership process positively affect workers' life satisfaction. Additionally, this study determined that mindfulness at work, measured through workers' sense of meaning and membership or meaningfulness in and at work (Saks, 2011), was a key mechanism in mediating the relationship between spiritual leadership and life satisfaction. While the results of this study confirmed the inverse relationship of leadership resources on the OLBI energy continuum, the relative mean levels of vigor and exhaustion were different from expectations. For example, the expectation with these two dimensions in a culture of excessive work hours was that exhaustion levels would exceed vigor levels. However, mean exhaustion and vigor were 3.32 and 3.56 (based on 5-point Likert scale), respectively—that is, comparatively high for vigor and low for exhaustion despite excessive work hours. How might this be explained? According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), long working hours as a stressor can contribute to job burnout but do not necessarily result in disengaged workers, which was evidenced in the results of this research. Moreover, this study's sample was not focused on human service occupations, and the employees in this study appeared to find their work stressors manageable in that the results indicated only mild exhaustion. Finally, the context of this study was Korean culture, characterized by Confucian values of harmony, order, perseverance, and hard work (Ryu, 2007), as well as more individualistic aspects such as the pursuit of status, wealth, and recognition (Cha, 1994), suggesting that Korean workers manage the energy continuum of burnout through a mixture of underlying cultural drives and individualistic motivations. Given the close ties between Confucian and spiritual leadership values in Korea (Hunsaker, 2014), the impact of spiritual leadership within organizational

cultures likely also played a role in the findings of this study based on values of respect, support, understanding, a drive for excellence, and inspiring vision (Fry, 2003).

## 6. Limitations

Beyond limitations related to the cross-sectional design and a population sampled in a Confucian-centric cultural setting, a key limitation of this study was; not testing for the burnout effects of disengagement within the OLBI scale (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008). While this study found that spiritual leadership and mediators contributed 26% of total explained variance of exhaustion, including disengagement would likely have provided a broader assessment of the impact of spiritual leadership on job burnout, as defined through the OLBI.

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