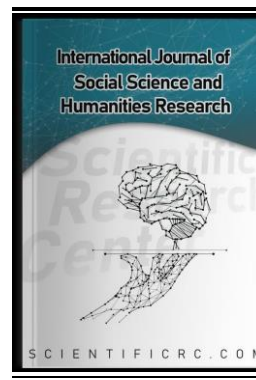


SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH CENTER

International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research
Vol. 5, No. 1, 2026, pp. 01-20.

ISSN 2348-2990



www.scientificrc.com

The Impact of Organizational Justice and Spiritual Leadership on Employees' Affective Commitment: Explaining the Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment among Employees of Bank Melli Branches in Mazandaran Province

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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the effects of organizational justice and spiritual leadership on affective commitment in Bank Melli branches in Mazandaran Province, with a particular focus on the mediating role of psychological empowerment. In terms of purpose, this research is applied, and in terms of data collection, it employs a descriptive survey design. The statistical population consisted of all managers and employees working in Bank Melli branches across Mazandaran Province. Using a simple random sampling method, 208 participants were selected as the study sample. The data collection instruments included the Organizational Justice Questionnaire (Niehoff & Moorman, 1996), the Spiritual Leadership Questionnaire (Fry, 2003), the Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire (Spreitzer, 1995), and the Affective Commitment Questionnaire (Allen & Meyer, 1990). The reliability of all instruments was confirmed, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.70. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 25 for descriptive statistics and SmartPLS version 3 for inferential analyses and structural equation modeling. The findings revealed that organizational justice and spiritual leadership had positive and statistically significant effects on both psychological empowerment and employees' affective commitment. Furthermore, psychological empowerment had a positive and significant effect on affective commitment. The results also demonstrated that psychological empowerment played a significant mediating role in the relationships of organizational justice and spiritual leadership with affective commitment. The findings suggest that enhancing employees' perceptions of fairness in organizational procedures, interactions, and outcomes, alongside adopting a spiritual leadership style grounded in meaning, shared values, and attention to employees' inner needs, can foster a greater sense of competence, self-determination, and impact in the workplace. Under such conditions, increased psychological empowerment serves as a key mechanism for strengthening employees' emotional attachment to the organization and enhancing their willingness to remain with the organization, participate actively, and align their efforts with organizational goals.

Keywords: Organizational Justice, Spiritual Leadership, Psychological Empowerment, Affective Commitment.

Introduction

In recent decades, organizations worldwide have faced increasing challenges in retaining and developing their human capital. One of the most significant of these challenges is the decline in employees' affective commitment to their organizations. Affective commitment is defined as an employee's emotional attachment to, sense of belonging to, and identification with the organization. It plays a fundamental role in workforce stability, reducing turnover intentions, and improving performance (Heydari, 2022; Lahmar et al., 2023). Persistently low levels of affective commitment may result in reduced motivation, declining service quality, increased withdrawal behaviors, and the erosion of organizational social capital. These issues are particularly critical for governmental and policymaking organizations, including public institutions.

Research indicates that employees' negative perceptions of the organizational environment, particularly with regard to organizational justice and leadership style, are among the main factors undermining affective commitment (Aldabbas et al., 2025; Warsono et al., 2024). Domestic studies also suggest that some employees in public-sector organizations perceive injustice in resource allocation, decision-making procedures, and managerial interactions, which may weaken their emotional attachment to their organizations (Bonyadi & Mahdinejad, 2022; Takaei et al., 2022). At the organizational and regional levels, particularly in decision-making institutions, structural complexity, the sensitivity of organizational missions, and work-related pressures may contribute to employees' psychological and emotional exhaustion when perceived justice and effective leadership are lacking.

One of the key factors influencing affective commitment is organizational justice, which encompasses distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Perceived justice reflects employees' assessments of the fairness of organizational outcomes, decision-making processes, and managerial behavior, and plays a fundamental role in shaping positive organizational attitudes (Ardalan & Majooni, 2021). Research findings indicate that organizational injustice can reduce trust, undermine motivation, and weaken organizational commitment, whereas perceived justice strengthens employees' commitment and loyalty (Esfahani-Asl & Sedaghatjoo, 2015; Aggarwal et al., 2022). Persistent injustice can have adverse consequences not only for individual employees but also for the organization as a whole.

Alongside organizational justice, spiritual leadership has emerged as an innovative leadership approach that emphasizes fulfilling employees' inner needs, creating meaning in work, and fostering a sense of membership and belonging. By focusing on an inspiring vision, altruistic love, and faith, this leadership style can provide the psychological foundation necessary for sustainable affective commitment (Maleki & Jafari, 2016; Abd et al., 2024). Domestic and international studies have demonstrated that spiritual leadership is significantly associated with positive job attitudes, organizational commitment, and organizational vitality (Arabshahi & Zanganeh Ebrahimi, 2022; Rahmatika et al., 2022). Nevertheless, some evidence suggests that the effects of spiritual leadership are not always direct and may instead be transmitted through psychological constructs.

In this context, psychological empowerment is considered one of the most important explanatory mechanisms. Psychological empowerment refers to employees' perceptions of competence, self-determination, impact, meaning, and trust, and plays an important mediating role in transmitting the effects of justice and leadership to attitudinal outcomes (Safari & Hosseini, 2021; Al Otaibi et al., 2023). Research has shown that organizational justice and positive leadership styles can enhance affective commitment by increasing psychological empowerment (Farrokhzadian et al., 2023). However, some studies have reported differences in the strength and pathways of these relationships (Srivastava et al., 2025), highlighting the need to examine these constructs within specific organizational contexts.

Despite the considerable body of existing research, the simultaneous examination of organizational justice and spiritual leadership in relation to affective commitment, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of psychological empowerment, has received limited attention, especially among employees of Bank Melli branches in Mazandaran Province. Most previous studies have focused on a single independent variable or have examined the mediating roles of psychological variables only to a limited extent (Abdolmajid & Sharififar, 2022; Ayad & Hasanein, 2025). This research gap highlights the need for a comprehensive study tailored to the specific organizational context. Accordingly, the present study seeks to address this gap by answering the following central research question: Does psychological empowerment play a significant mediating role in the relationship between organizational justice and affective commitment, and between spiritual leadership and affective commitment, among employees of Bank Melli branches in Mazandaran Province?

Lecture Review

-Organizational Justice

The importance of justice for organizations and their managers can be examined from three fundamental perspectives: ethical, business, and legal. From an ethical perspective, the degree of societal support for or opposition to organizations largely depends on their adherence to principles and standards of justice. Organizations are therefore expected to comply with the justice-oriented norms and standards accepted by society in all their activities. This perspective emphasizes that organizational actions should be fair and equitable and should take the interests of key stakeholders, including customers and employees, into account. Although maximizing shareholder profits is considered a legitimate and lawful objective, society expects organizations to pursue this goal without violating the rights of others.

From a business perspective, injustice can impose substantial costs and losses on organizations. If society or customers perceive an organization's policies and procedures as unfair, the likelihood of boycotts against the organization or its products may increase. Furthermore, employees who perceive injustice in organizational practices or managerial decisions—whether directed toward themselves or society—may lose their motivation, commitment, and willingness to cooperate effectively. Such circumstances can lead to dissatisfaction, work alienation, and declining morale, ultimately reducing productivity and weakening organizational performance.

The third perspective concerns the legal dimension of organizational justice. As public awareness and educational attainment have increased, particularly among the workforce, employees' and citizens'

expectations regarding fair treatment in the workplace have risen considerably. Reduced disparities between professional and nonprofessional occupations, together with broader access to legal information, have made individuals more sensitive to violations of justice. Consequently, as societies increasingly express their demands and engage in collective protests, organizations are becoming more exposed to complaints and legal disputes. Workplace justice has therefore rapidly emerged as an important and challenging legal issue, and neglecting it may result in serious legal consequences for organizations (Chelladurai, 2005).

-Spiritual Leadership

In contemporary organizations, viewing employees as strategic human capital has become fundamental to achieving organizational objectives. Management experience suggests that the more effectively employees' material and extrinsic needs are met, the more favorable the conditions become for addressing their psychological, emotional, and intrinsic needs. Neglecting these needs may result in adverse outcomes, including diminished individual performance, reduced productivity, and weakened work motivation, ultimately leading to employee disengagement. Accordingly, organizational leaders play a central role in exerting constructive influence on their followers to develop employees' capabilities and competencies in pursuit of organizational goals.

Within this framework, effective leaders focus not only on employees' physical and occupational circumstances but also on their cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. These aspects have received relatively limited attention in many classical leadership theories, in which spirituality has largely been overlooked (Fry, 2003).

According to Gibbons (2001), spiritual leadership focuses less on the individual characteristics of a leader and more on the process of collective social influence through which all group members are empowered to pursue meaningful and purposeful activities. Compared with other leadership theories, this approach places less emphasis on the centrality of the individual leader and greater emphasis on collective participation in meeting spiritual needs, strengthening commitment, and improving organizational performance. Within this framework, spiritual needs constitute the foundation of spiritual leadership, and any individual who positively contributes to group development, a sense of belonging, and collective performance can assume a leadership role. Thus, spiritual leadership is both a product of interactions among group members and a factor that strengthens these interactions among formal and informal leaders within an organization (Fry et al., 2011).

Ultimately, spiritual leadership is a dynamic, causal process that motivates and inspires employees by articulating a transcendent vision and fostering a culture grounded in altruistic values. This process helps cultivate a committed, motivated, and productive workforce. By increasing individuals' awareness of themselves, others, nature, and the transcendent dimensions of existence, spiritual leaders strengthen employees' interest in and attachment to their work while fostering the intrinsic motivation necessary for effective job performance. This, in turn, contributes to employees' spiritual well-being. Accordingly, spiritual leadership, as a causal leadership theory, plays a fundamental role in organizational transformation, the development of intrinsic motivation, and the formation of learning organizations. Its

ultimate objective is to align organizational vision and values with strategy, empower individuals and teams, and sustainably enhance productivity and organizational commitment (Fry, 2005).

-Models of Employees' Psychological Empowerment

Spreitzer's Empowerment Model: Building on empirical tests of Thomas and Velthouse's model among middle-level employees in a commercial organization and operational-level employees in an insurance company, Spreitzer developed a conceptual model illustrating the factors influencing psychological empowerment. According to Spreitzer (1995), despite the growing emphasis on empowerment in management literature, the lack of theory-based investigations of psychological empowerment in workplace settings had constrained further research in this area. She conceptualized empowerment as a continuous variable, whereby employees may experience different degrees of empowerment. In her research at California State University, Spreitzer examined the dimensions of psychological empowerment and how it could be measured in the workplace.

Kanter's Empowerment Model: Kanter (1993) argued that individuals with higher levels of formal and informal power within their organizations have greater access to empowering workplace structures, including opportunities, resources, information, and support. Access to these structures shapes employees' attitudes and behaviors and ultimately contributes to greater job effectiveness (Heidi et al., 2005).

Riley and Colleagues' Empowerment Model: Recognizing the importance of empowerment and its contribution to organizational success, Riley, Bentley, and Lin examined aspects of empowerment that are frequently overlooked. Drawing on previous research, these scholars identified three principal characteristics of empowerment: efficiency, innovation, and commitment (Riley et al., 2003).

Avolio and Colleagues' Empowerment Model: Avolio and colleagues (2004) investigated the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between leadership and employees' organizational commitment. Their study involved a sample of 540 nurses working in a public hospital in Indonesia. In addition to examining this mediating relationship, they investigated the role of organizational distance—distinguishing between direct and indirect leadership—and its influence on the relationship between leaders and employees.

Abdollahi and Noe-Ebrahimi's Empowerment Model: In their study entitled *Designing a Model of Psychological Empowerment for Employees of the Central Administration of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology*, Abdollahi and Noe-Ebrahimi (2006) found that managerial strategies, as an independent variable, did not directly influence psychological empowerment. Instead, their effects were mediated by organizational conditions and self-efficacy resources. They also found that self-efficacy resources did not directly affect psychological empowerment but influenced it through organizational conditions. Organizational conditions, in turn, had a direct effect on psychological empowerment.

These findings suggest that empowerment does not simply mean granting subordinates power and decision-making authority. Rather, employee empowerment is an internal and individual process, and managers must establish conditions that enable employees to empower themselves.

According to researchers and scholars, empowerment is a multidimensional construct (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995; Abdollahi & Noe-Ebrahimi, 2006) comprising five cognitive dimensions: self-efficacy, self-determination, impact, meaning, and trust.

Conceptual Empowerment Model: According to the conceptual model presented in the original study, organizations seeking to survive and progress in the turbulent and rapidly changing environment of science and technology must maintain flexibility in their processes, development activities, equipment, personnel, and programs. Other essential capabilities, including the ability to identify changes and respond rapidly to environmental developments, can also help ensure organizational survival and progress (Iranzadeh & Babaei Heravi, 2010).

Systems Model of Empowerment: The systems model of empowerment was developed at the University of Tehran in 2001. This model applies a three-dimensional analytical framework encompassing structure, behavior, and context to examine variables associated with managerial empowerment (Iranzadeh & Babaei Heravi, 2010).

Affective Commitment: By analyzing Porter and colleagues' affective commitment questionnaire, Angle and Perry developed a two-dimensional model distinguishing between value commitment and commitment to stay. Value commitment represents an individual's psychological and emotional willingness to actively support the organization's goals and mission. In contrast, commitment to stay is primarily based on economic exchange, consideration of rewards, and the assessment of potential costs associated with leaving the organization. This distinction provides a more precise basis for differentiating psychological commitment (affective/value-based) from calculative commitment (Mayer et al., 2015).

Similarly, Meyer and Schoorman (1991) examined organizational commitment through two distinct dimensions: continuance commitment and value commitment. In their model, continuance commitment is associated with an individual's desire to remain physically employed by the organization, whereas value commitment reflects the individual's willingness to exert additional effort toward achieving organizational goals. Although this model shares similarities with Angle and Perry's framework, its principal distinction lies in the behavioral emphasis of its dimensions. Specifically, continuance commitment influences the decision to remain with or leave the organization, whereas value commitment determines the level and intensity of effort an individual devotes to organizational objectives (Mayer et al., 2015).

Empirical Research on the Relationships among the Study Variables: Nouri Tirtashi and Yazdani Paraei (2025), in a study focusing on education-sector employees, investigated the mediating role of affective commitment in the relationship between psychological empowerment and work–family balance. Their findings revealed a positive and significant association between psychological empowerment and affective commitment. They also found that affective commitment facilitated the effect of psychological empowerment on work–family balance. More importantly, the results highlighted psychological empowerment as a particularly influential factor in the development of employees' affective commitment, emphasizing its importance as a key mechanism for improving work–family balance.

Regarding leadership styles, the relationship between spiritual leadership, empowerment, and organizational commitment has attracted considerable research attention. Fazlikhani et al. (2023), in a study conducted in the education sector, found that although spiritual leadership did not have a statistically significant direct effect on organizational commitment, it exerted a positive and significant indirect effect through employee empowerment. This finding emphasizes that achieving the desirable outcomes of spiritual leadership in educational organizations requires the establishment and strengthening of an empowering organizational environment.

Wulandari et al. (2025) conducted a study in Indonesia examining the effects of psychological empowerment, organizational justice, affective commitment, and self-efficacy on the job performance of supervisory officers. The findings indicated that all four variables—psychological empowerment, organizational justice, affective commitment, and self-efficacy—had positive and significant effects on job performance. Notably, affective commitment and self-efficacy served as important mediators that strengthened the effects of psychological empowerment and organizational justice on job performance. These findings highlight the complementary roles of individual psychological factors and perceptions of organizational justice in enhancing employee performance.

Al Hammadi and Abu Alalainin (2024) examined the roles of organizational justice, leadership, and psychological empowerment in promoting organizational citizenship behavior in the non-Western context of the United Arab Emirates. Their findings indicated that organizational justice influenced psychological empowerment and leader–member exchange (LMX), although it did not have a direct effect on organizational citizenship behavior. Leader–member exchange, in turn, enhanced psychological empowerment and organizational citizenship behavior, while psychological empowerment directly strengthened organizational citizenship behavior. The findings supported the mediating roles of leader–member exchange and psychological empowerment in explaining the relationship between organizational justice and organizational citizenship behavior.

Research Hypotheses

Main Hypothesis

Organizational justice and spiritual leadership have positive and significant effects on employees' affective commitment, with psychological empowerment playing a mediating role.

Sub-Hypotheses

- Organizational justice has a positive and significant effect on employees' affective commitment.
- Organizational justice has a positive and significant effect on employees' psychological empowerment.
- Spiritual leadership has a positive and significant effect on employees' affective commitment.
- Spiritual leadership has a positive and significant effect on employees' psychological empowerment.
- Psychological empowerment has a positive and significant effect on employees' affective commitment.

-Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between organizational justice and employees' affective commitment.

-Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and employees' affective commitment.

Research Methodology

This study is applied research employing a descriptive-analytical approach. It aims to examine the effects of organizational justice and spiritual leadership on employees' affective commitment, considering the mediating role of psychological empowerment among employees of Bank Melli branches in Mazandaran Province, Iran.

- Definitions of Variables

Organizational Justice

Organizational justice refers to employees' perceptions of fairness in workplace situations and relationships. It reflects the extent to which organizations adhere to principles of fairness in their behavior, decision-making, and interactions with their workforce. In particular, this concept focuses on the criteria employees use to determine whether they have been treated fairly or unfairly. Organizational justice is directly associated with employees' everyday workplace experiences and provides a framework for explaining how perceptions of fairness develop within organizations. According to Moorman (1991), organizational justice consists of three main dimensions: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice.

Operationally, organizational justice is measured by the scores obtained by respondents on the 20-item Organizational Justice Questionnaire developed by Niehoff and Moorman (1993). The questionnaire covers three dimensions and uses a five-point Likert scale.

Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual leadership refers to a process in which leaders motivate and inspire employees through a transcendent vision and the development of an organizational culture grounded in altruistic values. This process helps foster a motivated, committed, and productive workforce (Fry, 2005).

Operationally, spiritual leadership is measured by the scores obtained by respondents on a 25-item Spiritual Leadership Questionnaire adapted from Fry (2005). The instrument comprises seven dimensions: vision, altruistic love, faith, meaning, membership, organizational commitment, and performance feedback. This variable is measured using a five-point Likert scale (Appendix 1).

Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment is a process through which individuals' perceptions of self-efficacy are enhanced by establishing conditions that reduce feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. These

conditions may be created through formal organizational structures or informal techniques (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

Operationally, psychological empowerment is measured using the questionnaire developed by Spreitzer (1995) and Mishra and Spreitzer (1997). The questionnaire consists of 15 closed-ended items covering five dimensions: competence, self-determination, impact, meaning, and trust. Responses are measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Affective Commitment

Affective commitment, one of the fundamental components of organizational commitment, refers to the degree of an individual's emotional attachment, psychological involvement, and identification with an organization. Employees with strong affective commitment regard the organization as part of their identity and develop a deep sense of belonging to and attachment to its values, objectives, and mission.

Employees remain with an organization because of affective commitment not as a result of economic constraints or normative pressures, but because of intrinsic interest, loyalty, and a genuine belief in the organization's direction and mission. This emotional bond encourages employees to participate more actively in achieving organizational objectives and to perceive themselves as stakeholders in the organization's successes and failures.

Furthermore, affective commitment reflects a relatively enduring psychological relationship between an individual and an organization that extends beyond formal and contractual relationships. This form of commitment provides a foundation for voluntary behaviors that go beyond formal job requirements, increases intrinsic motivation, strengthens employees' sense of responsibility, and ultimately contributes to improved individual and organizational performance. In other words, the higher employees' affective commitment, the more likely they are to make sustained efforts to improve organizational effectiveness and maintain their membership in the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1991).

Operationally, affective commitment is assessed using the Organizational Commitment Scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). This questionnaire consists of 24 items across three dimensions: affective commitment (8 items), continuance commitment (8 items), and normative commitment (8 items). In the present study, only the affective commitment dimension was used, comprising eight closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale.

- Statistical Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Method

The statistical population of this study comprises all managers and employees working in Bank Melli branches in Mazandaran Province, Iran. The sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula and determined to be 208 participants.

To ensure statistical accuracy and minimize selection bias, simple random sampling was employed. This method ensured that every member of the statistical population had an equal and independent probability

of being selected. Accordingly, the selection of respondents was based on equal selection probabilities and was conducted without researcher bias, thereby helping preserve the internal validity of the findings.

A combined approach was adopted for data collection, integrating library-based research with field research. A Likert scale, one of the most widely used measurement scales in research, was employed to assess responses to the questionnaire items.

To establish validity, the instrument was evaluated by a panel of experts. Their collective assessment confirmed its face and content validity, and the final version of the questionnaire was considered to have satisfactory content validity.

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the research instruments. The coefficients were 0.784 for organizational justice, 0.785 for spiritual leadership, 0.766 for psychological empowerment, and 0.905 for affective commitment. Since all Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, the measurement instruments for all variables were considered to have acceptable reliability.

Structural equation modeling was employed to evaluate and validate the conceptual model and subsequently test the research hypotheses. All analyses were conducted using Smart PLS version 3.

Finding

Descriptive Findings

The demographic characteristics of the employees indicated that men outnumbered women. The majority of respondents (44.7%) were between 36 and 45 years of age, and most participants (54.8%) held a bachelor's degree. Regarding work experience, the largest proportion of respondents (39.9%) had between 11 and 15 years of service.

The descriptive statistics for organizational justice indicate that this variable was at a relatively favorable level within the study population. The overall mean was 3.45, with a standard deviation of 0.586, suggesting that respondents generally perceived organizational fairness positively, with relatively limited variation in their views.

The descriptive statistics for spiritual leadership also indicate a relatively favorable status. The overall mean was 3.34, with a standard deviation of 0.340, reflecting respondents' positive perceptions of spiritual leadership and an acceptable degree of agreement among their responses.

Psychological empowerment was likewise found to be at a relatively favorable level, with an overall mean of 3.56 and a standard deviation of 0.622. These results suggest that respondents generally perceived themselves as psychologically empowered, although their views exhibited a moderate degree of variation.

Affective commitment was also at a relatively favorable level, with a mean of 3.40 and a standard deviation of 0.487. This finding reflects respondents' positive assessments of their

emotional attachment, sense of belonging, and psychological identification with the organization, alongside relatively limited variation in their responses.

Inferential Findings

Given the non-normal distribution of the data, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationships among the research variables.

Table 1. Correlations Among the Research Variables

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Organizational justice	1	—	—	—
(2) Spiritual leadership	—	1	—	—
(3) Psychological empowerment	0.604*	0.646*	1	—
(4) Affective commitment	0.702*	0.729*	0.801*	1

Note: Correlations marked with an asterisk are significant at $p < 0.01$.

The Spearman correlation results indicate positive and statistically significant relationships among the research variables. Organizational justice was positively and significantly correlated with psychological empowerment ($r = 0.604$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that as employees' perceptions of organizational fairness increase, their sense of psychological empowerment also tends to increase.

Organizational justice was also positively and relatively strongly associated with affective commitment ($r = 0.702$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting the importance of fairness in fostering employees' emotional attachment and sense of belonging to the organization.

Similarly, spiritual leadership exhibited a positive and significant correlation with psychological empowerment ($r = 0.646$, $p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that spiritual leaders may help strengthen employees' perceptions of competence and autonomy by fostering meaning, a sense of value, and trust.

Furthermore, spiritual leadership was positively and strongly correlated with affective commitment ($r = 0.729$, $p < 0.01$), indicating a substantial association between this leadership style and employees' emotional attachment and loyalty to the organization.

Finally, the strongest correlation was observed between psychological empowerment and affective commitment ($r = 0.801$, $p < 0.01$). This result demonstrates a very strong association between employees' sense of empowerment and their affective commitment, underscoring the potential importance of psychological empowerment in strengthening affective commitment within organizations.

Hypothesis Testing

The research hypotheses were examined using the software output to assess the significance of the path coefficients between the variables. The path coefficients and their corresponding significance statistics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Structural Model Assessment Results for Testing the Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Structural path	Path coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
1	Organizational justice → Affective commitment	0.319	9.904	0.000	Supported
2	Organizational justice → Psychological empowerment	0.319	5.565	0.000	Supported
3	Spiritual leadership → Affective commitment	0.309	9.153	0.000	Supported
4	Spiritual leadership → Psychological empowerment	0.474	7.947	0.000	Supported
5	Psychological empowerment → Affective commitment	0.399	12.992	0.000	Supported

Note: A reported p-value of 0.000 should conventionally be presented as $p < 0.001$.

Because psychological empowerment was specified as a mediating variable in this study, a mediation analysis was conducted to determine whether it mediates the relationships between the independent variables and affective commitment.

The mediation hypotheses were tested using the bootstrapping technique in SmartPLS 3. The software reports the results automatically in the indirect effects output. The Sobel test was not used because the data were non-normally distributed. In the traditional Sobel approach, the unstandardized path coefficients and their standard errors are used to calculate a test statistic, which is then compared with the critical value of ± 1.96 . However, the present study employed bootstrapping to evaluate the significance of the indirect effects.

Table 3. Results of the Mediation Analysis

Hypothesis	Indirect path	Path coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
6	Organizational justice → Psychological empowerment → Affective commitment	0.127	5.262	0.000	Partial mediation
7	Spiritual leadership → Psychological empowerment → Affective commitment	0.189	6.969	0.000	Partial mediation

The results indicate that psychological empowerment significantly mediates the relationship between organizational justice and affective commitment, as well as the relationship between spiritual leadership and affective commitment. Since both indirect effects were statistically

significant, the findings support the mediating role of psychological empowerment in both relationships. The study characterizes these effects as partial mediation.

Assessing the Strength of the Mediating Effect Using the Variance Accounted For (VAF) Index
The Variance Accounted For (VAF) index is used to assess the magnitude of a mediating effect. Its value ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating that a larger proportion of the total effect is transmitted through the mediator. Specifically, VAF represents the ratio of the indirect effect to the total effect.

Mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between organizational justice and affective commitment

The VAF value for psychological empowerment in the relationship between organizational justice and affective commitment was reported as:

$$VAF = \frac{0.319 \times 0.399}{(0.319 \times 0.399) + 0.319} = 0.285$$

The result indicates that the VAF statistic was 0.285. This means that approximately 28.5% of the total effect of organizational justice on affective commitment is explained by the indirect pathway through psychological empowerment. The study therefore interprets this result as evidence of partial mediation.

Mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between spiritual leadership and affective commitment

The VAF value for psychological empowerment in the relationship between spiritual leadership and affective commitment was reported as:

$$VAF = \frac{0.474 \times 0.399}{(0.474 \times 0.399) + 0.309} = 0.379$$

The result indicates that the VAF statistic was 0.379. This means that approximately 37.9% of the total effect of spiritual leadership on affective commitment is explained by the indirect pathway through psychological empowerment. Accordingly, the study interprets this result as evidence of partial mediation.

Conclusions

Sub-Hypothesis 1: The Effect of Organizational Justice on Affective Commitment

The statistical findings indicate that organizational justice has a positive and significant effect on employees' affective commitment, thereby supporting the first sub-hypothesis. This result clearly suggests that employees who perceive greater fairness in the distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions of organizational justice are more likely to express a sense of belonging, loyalty, and emotional attachment to their organization. In the workplace, these perceptions can contribute to increased motivation and stronger commitment to collective organizational goals.

From a theoretical perspective, this relationship can be explained through Social Exchange Theory (SET). According to this framework, when employees experience fair and supportive treatment from their organization, they develop a sense of reciprocity and seek to respond constructively to this positive

treatment. Such responses may take the form of stronger affective commitment, increased effort, and a greater willingness to remain with the organization. In other words, organizational justice acts as a fundamental determinant of workplace relationships, transforming them from relationships based primarily on economic contracts into relationships characterized by trust, mutual respect, and a sense of belonging.

From a managerial perspective, this finding highlights the importance of institutionalizing and consistently maintaining fairness across organizational policies, procedures, and interpersonal interactions. Such practices constitute an essential prerequisite for strengthening employee motivation and loyalty in the public-sector institution examined in this study.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with previous research. In Iran, Heydari (2022) examined the mediating role of affective commitment in the relationship between organizational justice and teachers' turnover intentions, while Bonyadi and Mahdinejad (2022) reported a positive effect of organizational justice on school administrators' commitment. Both studies support the importance of fairness in strengthening employees' attachment to their organizations. Internationally, studies by Warsono et al. (2024) and Aldabbas et al. (2025) have also emphasized the role of organizational justice in strengthening employee commitment across public- and private-sector contexts.

Sub-Hypothesis 2: The Effect of Organizational Justice on Psychological Empowerment

The findings for the second sub-hypothesis indicate that establishing a fair, transparent, and equitable organizational environment is an essential prerequisite for enhancing employees' motivational and cognitive states. Such an environment can also directly support their personal and professional development.

The relationship can be explained through Self-Determination Theory (SDT). According to this theory, when organizational justice helps satisfy employees' fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, their intrinsic motivation is strengthened. Consequently, important dimensions of psychological empowerment, particularly competence and self-determination, may improve. More specifically, organizational justice acts as a key motivational factor that strengthens employees' intrinsic motivation and perceived competence, enabling them to participate more actively and creatively in organizational processes with a greater sense of ownership and responsibility.

The research literature also supports this interpretation. The findings are consistent with Ardalan and Majooni (2021), who reported a positive relationship between organizational justice, psychological empowerment, and employee job satisfaction. They are also consistent with Safari and Hosseini (2021), who found that organizational justice can contribute to psychological empowerment even in the presence of structural barriers. At the international level, findings reported by Srivastava et al. (2025) and Al Hammadi and Abu Alalainin (2024) underscore the importance of organizational justice in promoting psychological empowerment and, in related organizational contexts, organizational citizenship behavior.

Sub-Hypothesis 3: The Effect of Spiritual Leadership on Psychological Empowerment

The findings concerning the third sub-hypothesis highlight the influence of leaders who inspire employees, promote a transcendent vision, and emphasize ethical principles and personal spirituality in creating a meaningful work environment. In such an environment, employees may experience stronger feelings of competence, choice, meaning in their work, and influence over organizational processes. In other words, spiritual leadership, through its emphasis on inner motivation and higher-order values, helps employees perceive themselves as capable and influential contributors to the achievement of organizational goals.

From a theoretical perspective, this constructive relationship can be explained through Self-Determination Theory (SDT). By creating a work environment that supports employees' fundamental psychological needs, particularly autonomy and competence, spiritual leadership can foster intrinsic motivation. This motivation, in turn, may strengthen the dimensions of psychological empowerment. By instilling meaning in everyday activities, spiritual leaders help employees recognize that their work is valuable and extends beyond the fulfillment of routine job duties. This sense of purpose can subsequently enhance employees' psychological readiness and practical capacity to make decisions and perform their responsibilities.

This finding is consistent with previous domestic and international research. Studies conducted in Iran, including those by Mohammadzadeh et al. (2023) and Safari and Hosseini (2021), have highlighted the role of spiritual leadership in strengthening employees' psychological empowerment. Internationally, studies such as those attributed to Vlahos et al. (2024) and Dimon and Sharma (2024) have emphasized the importance of spiritual leadership in fostering employees' perceived power and psychological capability across different organizational settings.

Sub-Hypothesis 4: The Effect of Spiritual Leadership on Psychological Empowerment

The findings for the fourth sub-hypothesis indicate that leaders who promote spiritual values, develop an inspiring vision, and emphasize personal growth and meaning in employees' working lives can strengthen the cognitive and motivational dimensions of psychological empowerment, including competence, self-determination, meaning, and impact. Therefore, developing a spiritual leadership style within an organization can be an important means of enhancing employees' intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and psychological capacity to participate actively and effectively in organizational processes. It may also contribute to higher productivity and a healthier workplace environment.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings are consistent with both Spiritual Leadership Theory and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). By creating an environment characterized by meaningful values and higher-order goals, spiritual leaders can support employees' fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Meeting these needs can strengthen psychological empowerment because employees recognize the significance of their work and perceive themselves as possessing the competence and discretion required to influence the achievement of organizational goals.

The finding is also consistent with previous research. In Iran, Arabshahi and Zanganeh Ebrahimi (2022) reported a relationship among spiritual leadership, psychological empowerment, and organizational vitality. Similarly, the study by Abdulmajid and Sharififar (2022) on the positive effect of spiritual

leadership on the empowerment of female managers provides related evidence. Internationally, studies attributed to Ayad and Hasanein (2025) and Zhou et al. (2023) have emphasized the central role of psychological empowerment in transmitting the effects of spiritual leadership to employee performance and motivation.

Sub-Hypothesis 5: The Effect of Psychological Empowerment on Affective Commitment

The fifth sub-hypothesis can be explained theoretically through the framework of psychological empowerment. This perspective suggests that empowerment activates intrinsic motivation by strengthening four key dimensions: competence, self-determination, meaning, and impact. In turn, these dimensions can contribute to stronger affective commitment. Employees who believe they have substantial control over their work activities and decisions and perceive their work as meaningful are more likely to develop a deeper emotional attachment to their organization because they regard it as an environment in which they can realize their abilities and personal values.

The findings are consistent with a broad range of domestic and international studies. In Iran, Nouri Tirtashi and Yazdani Paraei (2025), as well as Farrokhzadian et al. (2023), emphasized the positive relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment among different occupational groups, including nurses. Internationally, findings attributed to Al Otaibi et al. (2023) and Ochoa Pacheco et al. (2023) have indicated positive effects of empowerment on affective commitment and employee job performance. These findings underscore the importance of psychological empowerment in developing a loyal and committed workforce.

Sub-Hypothesis 6: The Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment in the Relationship Between Organizational Justice and Affective Commitment

The mechanism underlying this relationship can be explained as follows: when employees experience fair treatment, equitable decisions, and transparent organizational policies, they develop a fundamental sense of trust and respect. Such a fair environment can strengthen their psychological resources, including competence and autonomy, and foster a greater sense of impact and ownership in the workplace. The resulting increase in psychological empowerment can, in turn, contribute to stronger affective commitment. Thus, psychological empowerment serves as a potential connecting mechanism through which employees' external perceptions of organizational justice are translated into stronger internal emotional attachment to the organization.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding is consistent with the principles of organizational justice and psychological empowerment. By fostering fairness and mutual trust, organizational justice creates favorable conditions for strengthening employees' psychological resources. Under these conditions, psychological empowerment—through greater autonomy, competence, and meaning—can help transmit the effects of organizational justice to employees' affective attachment. The study therefore highlights psychological empowerment as an important pathway through which fairness may strengthen employees' emotional bonds with their organization. This interpretation is consistent with the broader argument that a

fair work environment and stronger psychological empowerment are important conditions for fostering affective commitment.

These results are supported by several domestic and international studies. In Iran, Takaei et al. (2022) and Esfahani-Asl and Sedaghatjoo (2015) reported that psychological empowerment plays a mediating role in the relationship between organizational justice and organizational commitment. Internationally, findings attributed to Wulandari et al. (2025) and Aggarwal et al. (2022) have emphasized the mediating importance of psychological empowerment in transmitting the effects of organizational justice to employee commitment and improved performance.

Sub-Hypothesis 7: The Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment in the Relationship Between Spiritual Leadership and Affective Commitment

The mechanism underlying this relationship operates as follows: spiritual leaders promote an inspiring and meaningful vision and emphasize ethical and spiritual values, thereby creating an environment in which employees perceive their work as more than a set of routine duties. This sense of depth and meaning can strengthen their psychological autonomy, competence, and perceived impact. Psychological empowerment consequently acts as an intervening mechanism through which spiritual leadership can contribute to stronger and more enduring affective attachment and loyalty. Organizations whose leaders adopt a spiritual leadership style may therefore foster more sustainable intrinsic motivation and deeper affective commitment by empowering their employees.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding is consistent with the principles of Spiritual Leadership Theory and psychological empowerment. By supporting fundamental psychological needs, particularly autonomy and competence, spiritual leaders can strengthen intrinsic motivation and create a pathway through which their leadership style influences employees' emotional bonds with the organization. In this context, empowerment is not merely an outcome of leadership; it is also an important mechanism through which the higher-order objectives of spiritual leadership may be realized.

These findings are consistent with the existing research literature. In Iran, Farzaneh Hamzehzadeh (2014) and Maleki and Jafari (2016) reported the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between spiritual leadership and, respectively, social responsibility and organizational citizenship behavior. Internationally, recent studies attributed to Ayad and Hasanein (2025) and Rahmatika et al. (2022) have emphasized the mediating role of psychological empowerment in transmitting the effects of spiritual leadership to employee commitment and improved organizational performance.

In light of the existing theoretical literature, the findings, and the limitations of the present study, the following managerial recommendations and research directions are proposed:

-Promote organizational justice: To strengthen employees' affective commitment, organizations should design work schedules, compensation systems, and job responsibilities in ways that employees perceive as fair. This can be achieved by clarifying performance evaluation criteria and establishing regular feedback mechanisms.

-Encourage employee participation: Employees should be given opportunities to participate in work-related decisions and express their views. Such practices can strengthen their sense of autonomy and impact, thereby enhancing psychological empowerment.

-Foster supportive interpersonal relationships: Organizations should respond to employees' needs and problems with honesty, respect, and support. These behaviors can strengthen employees' sense of belonging and affective loyalty.

-Expand employee autonomy: Employees should be provided with sufficient discretion and independence to perform their duties and exercise initiative. Such opportunities can strengthen their sense of impact and autonomy and improve psychological empowerment.

-Invest in training and career development: Organizations should provide training and professional development programs that help employees acquire the skills required for their responsibilities and recognize the personal and professional significance of their work.

-Integrate justice with empowerment initiatives: Organizations should combine distributive and procedural justice with initiatives designed to strengthen employees' autonomy and competence. This approach may enhance the effect of organizational justice on affective commitment through psychological empowerment.

-Communicate spiritual values and organizational vision: Organizations should communicate their vision and spiritual values in ways that help employees develop a stronger sense of competence, meaning, and impact in their work.

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