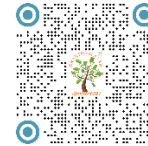


Original Article

WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY, INTRINSIC MOTIVATION, AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK WITH EVIDENCE FROM THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to explore the interrelationship between workplace spirituality (WPS), intrinsic motivation (IM) and employee engagement (EE) in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sector. In order to propose a mediation model between the constructs of the paper, the paper incorporates the three theories of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. In high-pressure, compliance-driven environments like the pharmaceutical and healthcare industry, meaning-centred, purpose-driven work cultures could have a significant impact. Drawing on the existing theoretical and empirical literature, the paper concludes that the spiritually enriched environment (SWE), as a construct, is defined by the presence of meaningful work, sense of community, personal and organizational values, and compassionate ethical practices; and that these factors are linked to the development of intrinsic motivation which consequently leads to increased levels of engagement. Five testable hypotheses and a conceptual framework are proposed to help in the future empirical research in this field.

Keywords: Workplace Spirituality, Employee Engagement, Intrinsic Motivation, Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Sector, Self-Determination Theory, Mediation

INTRODUCTION

Today's workplace is changing drastically. Organizations are facing greater workforce disengagement, mental health issues, and a push to find work that has meaning for employees, making them more critical to reconsidering traditional human resource (HR) practices. Workplace spirituality has gained a great momentum as a tool for improving organizational effectiveness but is not used in a religious context, rather as a way to show the inner life of employees, their quest for meaning, a sense of community and the congruence between personal values and organizational values [Ashmos and Duchon \(2000\)](#), [Milliman et al. \(2003\)](#).

Concurrently, the physical, cognitive, and emotional commitment that employees put into their jobs [Kahn \(1990\)](#) is one of the outcomes most studied in organizational behaviour. Low engagement is consistently associated with poor outcomes at the organizational level, including poor organizational performance, high turnover rates and lower well-being [Macey and Schneider \(2008\)](#), [Saks \(2011\)](#). Even with these worries, studies examining the association of spiritually enriched workplaces and employee engagement via intermediary psychological processes are still scarce.

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Received: 16 April 2026; Accepted: 28 May 2026; Published 22 June 2026

DOI: [10.29121/ShodhPrabandhan.v3.i1.2026.97](https://doi.org/10.29121/ShodhPrabandhan.v3.i1.2026.97)

Page Number: 101-108

Journal Title: ShodhPrabandhan: Journal of Management Studies

Journal Abbreviation: ShodhPrabandhan J. Manag. Stud.

Online ISSN: 3049-2416, Print ISSN: 3108-1975

Publisher: Granthaalayah Publications and Printers, India

Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Authors' Contributions: Each author made an equal contribution to the conception and design of the study. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Transparency: The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study. All essential aspects have been included, and any deviations from the original study plan have been clearly explained. The writing process strictly adhered to established ethical standards.

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One such mechanism is intrinsic motivation, which is the internal motivation that comes from an individual's intrinsic interest, autonomy, and satisfaction from the intrinsic nature of the task [Ryan and Deci \(2000\)](#). Employees who see their work as having a spiritual value and feel a sense of connection to others and to the organization's mission, are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, which will help to drive greater engagement. This chain—WPS → IM → EE—constitutes the conceptual core of this paper.

The pharmaceutical and healthcare sector, in both Indian and international contexts, offers a particularly compelling and under-considered setting for this enquiry. It is a large, knowledge-intensive and rapidly growing sector that employs a substantial and diverse workforce across manufacturing, quality assurance, research, and clinical and patient-facing roles. Yet, the human dimensions of this workforce, that is, the importance of spirituality and intrinsic motivation for shaping engagement, have not been studied extensively in the scholarly literature. The structure of this paper is as follows: In Section 2, the theoretical background is reviewed; in Section 3, the constructs are explained; in Section 4, the empirical evidence is synthesized; in Section 5, the conceptual framework and hypotheses are presented; in Sections 6–8, the relevance, implication, limitation and conclusions are presented.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY (SDT)

According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) [Ryan and Deci \(2000\)](#), humans have three basic psychological requirements: autonomy, competence and relatedness. If these needs are met at work, people are intrinsically motivated to work for the intrinsic rewards of work and not for external rewards. Means of meeting the three needs in the workplace are addressed by all three needs: competence (through meaningful work), relatedness (through sense of community), and autonomy (through connection to values). Theoretically speaking, SDT can serve as a solid foundation linking WPS and IM [Gagné and Deci \(2005\)](#). This is because intrinsically motivated employees will exhibit the vigour, dedication, and absorption that are key indicators of employee engagement [Schaufeli and Bakker \(2004\)](#).

CONSERVATION OF RESOURCES (COR) THEORY

The Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) [Hobfoll \(1989\)](#) suggests that people are driven to gain, maintain, preserve, and invest in resources. Workplace spirituality is considered a psychosocial resource that enhances the sense of purpose, social connection and values of the employees. In line with the COR Theory, when individuals have ample resources, they invest their resources in their work, leading to greater engagement [Sahoo and Mohapatra \(2022\)](#). Intrinsic motivation can also be considered a personal resource that can be saved and strengthened in an environment that is spiritually supportive and which interacts between WPS and EE.

JOB DEMANDS–RESOURCES (JD-R) MODEL

The JD-R model [Bakker and Demerouti \(2007\)](#) categorizes job demands as energy drainers and job resources as motivators and enablers of engagement. An important job resource in this model is workplace spirituality, which helps to inspire employees, increase their ability to respond to demands, and lower the likelihood of burnout and improve engagement. In this model, [Moon et al. \(2023\)](#) investigated how WPS can function as an upstream resource to foster intrinsic motivation, leading to job crafting and performance. [Grah et al. \(2024\)](#) also demonstrated the mediating role of intrinsic motivation as it strengthened the relationship between leadership and engagement in the JD-R framework, thereby enhancing the relationship between the two.

CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONSTRUCTS

WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

Workplace spirituality has three dimensions of organizational life—meaningful work at the individual level, a sense of community at the group level, and alignment with organizational values at the organizational level [Milliman et al. \(2003\)](#). It was also conceptualized by [Ashmos and Duchon \(2000\)](#) as the discovery of an inner life supported by meaningful work in a community framework. [Petchsawang and McLean \(2017\)](#) included the dimensions of compassion and mindful inner consciousness.

In this paper, workplace spirituality is defined as an organizational structure that enables workers to explore meaning, purpose and transcendence in their job experiences, including being interpersonally connected with others and ensuring alignment of personal values and organizational climate (but not necessarily religious or sectarian). The four dimensions are made operational with respect to meaningful work, sense of community, congruence with the organization's values, and ethical and compassionate practices.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Ryan and Deci (2000) described intrinsic motivation as a natural tendency to assimilate, master, engage in spontaneous interest, and explore, an internally regulated type of motivation in which people are motivated to engage in an activity for intrinsic satisfaction, rather than because of external contingencies (such as pay or recognition). Intrinsic motivation is triggered by psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness Gagné and Deci (2005). In organizational settings, it translates to more commitment, creativity, tenacity, and emotional engagement with the organization's objectives, which are characteristics of engaged workers. Tremblay et al. (2009) offered psychometric evidence of the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic orientations in organizational research.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Employee engagement was first described by Kahn (1990) as the use of an organizational member's self in his or her role, manifested in the physical, cognitive and emotional expression of one's true self in the performance of one's role. Later, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) tried to operationalize the concept of engagement by means of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which focuses on three dimensions: "vigor" (high energy and mental resilience), "dedication" (significance, enthusiasm and challenge), and "absorption" (full concentration in work). Macey and Schneider (2008) also described engagement as a strategic construct, which is associated with employee retention and productivity within the organization, and organizational citizenship. This paper proposes the use of the UWES framework to measure employee engagement.

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

There are strong empirical reasons to believe that a relation exists between EE and WPS and that the relation is positive. Saks (2011) is one of the first to systematically study this relationship, stating that workers who perceive their work environment as spiritually supportive are more cognitively and emotionally engaged in their work. Sengupta and Sahu (2017) revealed that in the Indian context of IT industry, increase in engagement was found to be statistically significant with all three dimensions of WPS; meaningful work, co-worker relationships, and organizational values had a positive relationship with energy, enthusiasm, and commitment. Balasundaram and Baskar (2020) found the same in an empirical study and thus confirmed that WPS is an important predictor of engagement.

More recently, Bantha et al. (2024) examined WPS specifically within millennial workers, who are especially receptive to purposeful work cultures. The results of the study conducted by Margaretha et al. (2021) showed that the relationships that arose in this study were considered significant positive between WPS, engagement, and professional commitment, specifically between WPS with engagement, WPS with professional commitment, and engagement with professional commitment. Choudhury and Sinha (2023) noted that those who felt their companies were spiritually connected (with ethical behavior, caring and environmental protection) were more engaged. McKenna et al. (2022) concluded in a healthcare environment that the inclusion of spiritual support led to a decrease in emotional exhaustion and an increase in engagement. In a study of the hospitality sector by Milliman et al. (2018), the three WPS dimensions positively predicted engagement, and intent to stay.

WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

WPS's theoretical foundations for fostering intrinsic motivation are based on the idea that the spiritually enriched environment meets psychological needs that SDT has identified as necessary for intrinsic motivation, including purpose, belonging, and authenticity Ryan and Deci (2000), Gagné and Deci (2005). Sahoo and Mohapatra (2022) presented the most empirical evidence for this connection by showing an empirical link between employees' perceptions of higher levels of WPS and significantly greater intrinsic motivation; they further illustrated that the meaningfulness built through WPS can lead to an increase in inner motivation to undertake tasks for their own satisfaction.

Moon et al. (2023) found that WPS serves as a job resource at the upstream level, and it can stimulate intrinsic motivation, which can then foster job crafting and increased performance. The first step in a chain-mediation process was identified as the pathway of WPS on promoting IM, which in turn promotes job crafting and thereby leads to improved performance Li et al. (2025). The same, Sharma and Kumra (2020) found that WPS has an impact on organizational justice perceptions and mental health, which in turn increases internal motivation. In a study conducted by Salem et al. (2023), individual and workplace spirituality were found to have a significant effect on employee well-being and engagement, and intrinsic drivers were found to play a key role.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Khan and Iqbal (2013) found that there is a strong positive correlation between intrinsic motivation and employee engagement, with intrinsic motivation (based on joy, curiosity and purpose) creating a greater and longer engagement with the organization than for extrinsically motivated compliance. Van Tuin et al. (2021) showed that engaging leadership is related to employees' basic psychological needs satisfaction and intrinsic values, thereby indicating the importance of intrinsic mechanisms. Based on SDT and the JD-R model, Grah et al. (2024) demonstrated that the relationship between transformational leadership and engagement is significantly moderated by intrinsic motivation, making intrinsic motivational acts as a personal resource in the engagement process.

The mediators between WPS and employee engagement were specifically studied by Mutiara and Nurhayati (2023) and the results showed that the mediators have a significant influence, namely achievement motivation which is a type of intrinsic motivation. This study is a direct empirical support of the mediation pathway proposed in the present paper.

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Although nascent, there is empirical evidence for the complete mediation chain of WPS → IM and EE. According to Sahoo and Mohapatra (2022) when employees are intrinsically motivated in a spiritually supportive environment, their engagement levels were significantly higher. Moon et al. (2023) found that WPS does not directly affect performance; instead, it does so via IM, which acts as the predominant pathway in which WPS acts. This mediation was also confirmed in an Indonesian business sample by Mutiara and Nurhayati (2023). Overall, these studies provide further evidence of the role of IM in explaining EE, which should be systematically explored in the pharmaceutical context.

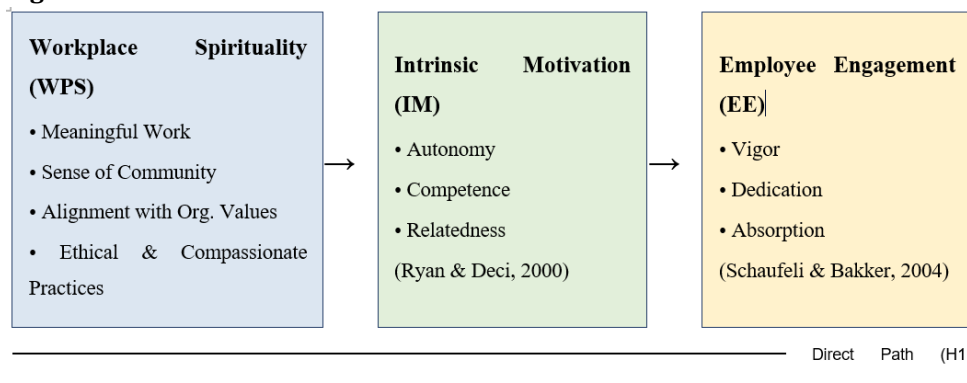
PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Review of theoretical and empirical literature provides basis for proposing a mediation model where Workplace Spirituality (independent variable) has a direct effect on Employee Engagement (dependent variable) as well as an indirect effect via Intrinsic Motivation (mediating variable). The framework is grounded in SDT Ryan and Deci (2000), COR Theory Hobfoll (1989), and the JD-R model Bakker and Demerouti (2007) as shown in Figure 1.

There are four dimensions to operationalizing WPS: meaningful work, sense of community, alignment with organizational values, and ethical and compassionate practices Milliman et al. (2003), Petchsawang and McLean (2017). The intermediary variable is intrinsic motivation which can be explained as the internal motivation to work for its intrinsic rewards Ryan and Deci (2000). The UWES dimensions of vigor, dedication and absorption Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) are used to measure employee engagement. Demographic variables are used as control variables, such as gender, age, job role, and work experience Sharma and Kumra (2020), Bantha et al. (2024).

Figure 1



Theoretical Foundations: Self-Determination Theory (SDT) | Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory | Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

Control Variables: Gender | Age | Job Role | Work Experience

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework: Workplace Spirituality, Intrinsic Motivation, and Employee Engagement

Note: H1 = Direct Effect of WPS on EE; H2 = WPS → IM; H3 = IM → EE; H4 = Mediation via IM; H5 = Demographic Differences.

PROPOSED HYPOTHESES

H1: Workplace spirituality has a significant and positive direct impact on employee engagement among pharmaceutical and healthcare sector employees [Saks \(2011\)](#), [Milliman et al. \(2018\)](#).

H2: Workplace spirituality has a significant and positive impact on intrinsic motivation among pharmaceutical and healthcare sector employees [Sahoo and Mohapatra \(2022\)](#), [Moon et al. \(2023\)](#).

H3: Intrinsic motivation has a significant and positive impact on employee engagement among pharmaceutical and healthcare sector employees [Grah et al. \(2024\)](#), [Van Tuin et al. \(2021\)](#).

H4: Intrinsic motivation significantly mediates the relationship between workplace spirituality and employee engagement among pharmaceutical and healthcare sector employees [Mutiarra and Nurhayati \(2023\)](#), [Moon et al. \(2023\)](#).

H5: There are significant differences in levels of workplace spirituality, intrinsic motivation, and employee engagement across demographic groups (gender, age, job role, and experience) in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sector [Bantha et al. \(2024\)](#), [Sharma and Kumra \(2020\)](#).

THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK

The direct link between WPS and EE (H1) is supported by a solid body of evidence that suggests that when work is meaningful and community-oriented, it can lead to employees' emotional and cognitive engagement in organizational objectives [Saks \(2011\)](#), [Milliman et al. \(2018\)](#), [Margaretha et al. \(2021\)](#). The relationship between WPS and IM is supported by SDT which proposes that environments that are spiritually enriched meet basic psychological needs which underlie intrinsic motivation [Gagné and Deci \(2005\)](#), [Sahoo and Mohapatra \(2022\)](#). The IM–EE relationship (H3) is based on the findings that internalisation of employees has an impact on their vigour, dedication and absorption [Grah et al. \(2024\)](#), [Van Tuin et al. \(2021\)](#), [Khan and Iqbal \(2013\)](#).

The conceptual core of the framework is the mediation hypothesis (H4). In line with [Moon et al. \(2023\)](#), and as also stated by [Li et al. \(2025\)](#), this paper suggests that WPS does not produce engagement in isolation, but rather produces an inner psychological state – intrinsic motivation – which drives engaged behaviours as outputs. The demographic hypothesis (H5) is driven by several studies which indicate that the motivational attitudes of employees are differently influenced by age, gender, job role and tenure [Sharma and Kumra \(2020\)](#), [Bantha et al. \(2024\)](#).

CONTEXTUAL RELEVANCE: THE PHARMACEUTICAL AND HEALTHCARE SECTOR

The pharmaceutical and healthcare sector is a unique and policy-relevant organizational setting. Across India and internationally, the sector has grown at an unprecedented pace and has emerged as a major source of employment, supporting a large and diverse workforce engaged in manufacturing, quality assurance, research, and clinical and patient-facing roles. This rapid expansion has made the sector a significant and economically important contributor to both national and global health systems.

However, although this is a large body of workers, research into the HR aspects of this workforce is limited, such as those related to engagement, motivation and health and wellbeing. The high compliance requirements, shift-work, repetitive work, and regulatory pressure in the pharmaceutical sector can lead to emotional exhaustion, disengagement and attrition. To address these issues, workplace spirituality, characterized by mission-oriented work, unity within the workplace, and values, could play a significant role in offering employees a sense of purpose in their work [Sahoo and Mohapatra \(2022\)](#), [Choudhury and Sinha \(2023\)](#).

Also, there is a natural resonance between the ethical responsibilities of the pharmaceutical industry, which produces drugs that directly impact human life and the values-alignment and compassionate aspects of WPS. Workplaces with a mission focused on social good and with a strong encouragement to link personal values with the work of healing and healthcare can achieve increased levels of intrinsic motivation and engagement [Milliman et al. \(2003\)](#), [Choudhury and Sinha \(2023\)](#). The pharmaceutical industry is a theoretically suitable and relevant context for the study of the WPS–IM–EE framework because of this contextual specificity.

IMPLICATIONS

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This paper has several contributions to the theoretical literature. First, it integrates three distinct schools of thought that have developed separately: WPS, IM, and EE. These constructs have been investigated in dyadic formats, but the conceptual integration of these constructs in a triadic context is a new theoretical contribution for the pharmaceutical context. Second, this paper illustrates with conceptual validity how theories of SDT, COR Theory, and the JD-R model provide a foundation for the proposed relationships.

Third, the paper tackles the research gap found by [Saks \(2011\)](#) which was an operationalization of intrinsic motivation as the exact psychological process by which WPS operates on EE, beyond correlational statements to mechanistic explanations as suggested by [Moon et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Li et al. \(2025\)](#). Fourth, this framework is tested for the first time in a novel empirical setting in the

pharmaceutical industry, building on research in the service, IT and healthcare industries which have dominated the literature on WPS.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This is an actionable guidance for HR managers and organizational leaders in the pharmaceutical industry. Some strategies to improve WPS include (a) redesigning roles to provide more variety in tasks and increased perceived value; (b) fostering team-based cultures that allow for the creation of real community; (c) creating processes to articulate value for employees, including through mission workshops; and (d) embedding ethical leadership practices, including compassion and respect, into the fabric of the organization [Milliman et al. \(2003\)](#), [Choudhury and Sinha \(2023\)](#).

Managers can increase task autonomy, give mastery-oriented feedback, set up development tasks and acknowledge intrinsic rewards as well as provide extrinsic rewards to boost intrinsic motivation [Ryan and Deci \(2000\)](#), [Gagné and Deci \(2005\)](#). The interventions take a spirituality approach, which is of particular interest in the pharmaceutical setting where the purpose of the work—making medicines which save lives—can be used as a natural source of IM and engagement.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The main drawback of this conceptual paper is the lack of empirical evidence to support the proposed relationships. This framework is based on research in a diverse range of sectors, cultures, and research methodology, and may not directly apply to the pharmaceutical environment without further empirical testing. Moreover, the geographical and institutional uniqueness of the pharmaceutical and healthcare sector may limit the transferability of the results for future use.

The research that follows needs to be conducted empirically in order to test the proposed framework and can be done with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) that is suitable for conducting mediation analysis in complex models with moderate sample sizes. Longitudinal designs would enhance causal inferences compared to planned cross-sectional designs. Extensions to the model can explore other mediators (e.g., psychological safety, perceived organizational support, job crafting) or moderators (e.g., leadership style, organizational size, tenure). Comparative studies of pharmaceutical clusters in various Indian states could be further enriching the evidence base.

CONCLUSION

The conceptual paper has proposed an integrative approach to connect the concepts of workplace spirituality, intrinsic motivation and employee engagement in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sector. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory [Ryan and Deci \(2000\)](#), Conservation of Resources Theory [Hobfoll \(1989\)](#), and the Job Demands–Resources model [Bakker and Demerouti \(2007\)](#), the paper states that spiritually enriched workplaces satisfy the needs for meaning, community, and value alignment, which in turn increases the level of internal motivation, which in turn leads to higher levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption in work [Schaufeli and Bakker \(2004\)](#).

The pharmaceutical and healthcare sector is one of the contexts of empirical significance for testing this framework, given its large and rapidly growing workforce, yet it remains highly under-explored in this regard. This paper contributes to the literature by theorising workplace spirituality as more than just a correlate of engagement, but as a cause of engagement (via intrinsic motivation). The hypotheses will be tested empirically, and the results will not only benefit the field of management theory, but will also provide pharmaceutical and healthcare HR professionals with evidence-based insights into building engaged, motivated and purpose-driven workforces.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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