



## Analysis of the Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment between Spiritual Leadership and Work Engagement

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**Abstract:** This research focuses on the relationship that exists between spiritual leadership and work engagement. Psychological empowerment plays decisive role in the way that how an individual observe and experience things in working environment. This study tries to fill the gap by exploring the mediating role of psychological empowerment between spiritual leadership and work engagement. Effective companies ensure that discipline and useful strategies are available to help employees feel more empowered and engaged. Primary data were collected through purposive sampling technique from 310 employees working in pharmaceutical companies located in the Peshawar Industrial Estate. The results showed that spiritual leadership is directly associated with work engagement. In addition, it was also explored that psychological empowerment mediates the said relationship. Theoretical and practical implications have been discussed and recommendations for further studies are provided.

**Key words:** Spiritual Leadership, Psychological Empowerment and Work Engagement

### 1. Introduction

Job engagement plays a vital role in the competency of a firm (Anderson & Sun, 2017). The success and failure of the organization depend on the willingness and engagement in their duties and responsibilities (Bakker et al., 2016). Employees, following the normal routing and completing the assigned daily tasks are productive and beneficial to the organization. Similarly, organizations need to trust their employees being engaged in their jobs (Zhou et al., 2022). Job engagement is phenomenon where the employees controls their ego and align it with the required job demands (Kahn, 1990) and such has been found important for achieving the required job demands at organizational level (Yang et al., 2019a) team and individual level (Seppälä et al., 2020; Bayighomog and Arasli, 2022). Job engagement is a key factor of emotion regulation and better performance at both individual and organizational level (Wu & Lee, 2020). For the overall success and failure of the organization, employees are the major stakeholders (Liu et al., 2022) and thus have been the key element for researchers (Liu et al., 2021). Work engagement is associated with individual's attitude, behavior and overall performance at work (Kim & Kim, 2021) and is important for enhancing the productivity (Ali et al., 2020). Before the pandemic (COVID-19) work engagement of employees was at boom, but as per latest reports now it is hardly 21% globally and 27% in South Asia (Gallop, 2022). Similarly, in South Asia region including Pakistan, 73% of the employees do not incorporate aesthetic standards to their work. These worrying results highlight the necessity of determining what influences employee

work engagement, particularly in Pakistan (Ali et al., 2021).

Research regarding different leadership styles and employee work engagement is progressing and has been linked with engagement at different levels (Bayighomog & Arasli, 2022). Researchers have linked different leadership styles with work engagement for example, Inclusive leadership (Cenkci et al., 2020), transformational leadership (Amor et al., 2020), humble leadership (Nguyen et al., 2020) and ethical leadership (Islam et al., 2023) and still research studies are needed to enrich the literature in this regard. Spiritual leadership can be defined as "the principles, traits, and practices required inspiring people on a personal level and providing them a feeling of spiritual survival via calling and engagement (Fry, 2003). Recently, it has been recognized that spiritual leadership is the capacity to provide others with vision, goals, belief, and loving connections to instigate motivate and inspire them on a personal level (Samul, 2024). Similarly, spiritual leadership has focus on body, attention and essence (Fry, 2003). Combining all the components "Head, hands and Heart" are involved in work engagement and accomplishing the organizational desired goals (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995, p. 110). Even though spiritual leadership appears to be a good fit for the requirements of employee engagement, sufficient studies have been conducted on the subject. Few studies suggested that employees' devotion to their jobs and organizations increases when their leaders and the organization respond to their spiritual requirements (Hunsaker & Jeong, 2020; Wu & Lee, 2020). Scholars have conducted studies regarding spiritual leadership in Asia in Hinduism culture and concluded the direct relationship (Samul, 2024) while other study concluded that spiritual leadership and work engagement has no connection. For the same reason there is need to enrich the empirical results in this domain and recent call for further investigations have also been called (Islam et al., 2024; Samul, 2024).

Another aspect of this research is the mediating role of psychological empowerment between spiritual leadership and work engagement. Leadership styles have been linked with desired positive behavior (Ye et al., 2020). For example, positive leadership style strengthened work engagement and other positive outcomes (Yang et al., 2019b). To promote work engagement, organization plays important role in empowering their employees psychologically (Boamah & Laschinger, 2015). Psychological state is a condition of enhanced inner task motivation comprises four mental elements: impact, competence, feeling of relevance, and self-determination (Spreitzer, 1995). These internal thoughts are a reflection of the individual's satisfying experiences received from the work at hand, such feeling are correlated to job engagement (Wang & Liu, 2015). Psychological empowerment of workers is believed to be essential towards developing a high-quality service that enables employees to carry out their responsibilities more effectively (Ahmad et al., 2021). Several studies suggested exploring the positive leadership styles with respect to desired behavior (Ou et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2018). It is assumed that spiritual leader would enhance psychological empowerment which further will lead to work engagement. Spiritual leaders back to psychological empowerment by guiding and purpose in such a way that an employee experiences highly motivation through values, vision and sense of obligation and ownership and further psychological empowerment improves individuals' performance and engagement. Empowered employees tend to be more engaged in their work. Spiritual leadership has focus on vision and enhances psychological empowerment and thus is more likely to influence work engagement. Recently, it has also been called to investigate the mediating role between psychological empowerment in a link between spiritual leadership and work engagement (Islam et al., 2024).

Psychological empowered employees tend to exhibit more engagement in their work by investing their energies and time (Vallerand et al., 2003). Such employees acknowledge and engage in their work as they choose to do it independently because they perceive a sense of endorsement and pleasure (Bayraktar & Jiménez, 2022). Self-determination theory (SDT) endorses these arguments that promote employees' performing their duties and responsibilities according to their judgments while relating to social and cultural contexts (Masson & Otto, 2021). SDT elaborates that how employees are determined in their jobs. Considering such determination exhibits their engagement and performance. As per SDT, psychological factors like, sovereignty, ability and affiliation contribute to enhance motivation and development of employees. The autonomous, skilled and competent employees develop working environment positive and thus are engaged in their jobs positively. The current study assumes that Self-driven professionals have ambitions and have a strong sense of personality growth, which enables them to dedicate every effort into their jobs (Thibault-Landry et al., 2018). Such passion and dedication motivate individuals to demonstrate employee job engagement and enhances the association between spiritual leadership and workers' job engagement.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Spiritual Leadership and Work Engagement**

It is well known that a leader's job precedes engagement (Shuck & Herd, 2011). Though, other leadership styles, like, servant leadership (Cai et al., 2024) transformational leadership styles (Nawaz, et al., 2014), inclusion leadership (Ly, 2024) have been extensively studied (Ahmad & Gul, 2021), these leadership philosophies and spiritual leadership have certain commonalities (Schaufeli, 2015). Yet it is distinctive and bears more comprehensive approach that includes more aspects. Based on empirical study, leaders that demonstrate this kind of dedication are those who provide opportunities for their followers to acquire new skills, and encourage them in utilizing their cognitive skills and abilities to accomplish their goals (Gul et al., 2021).

Spiritual leadership is an emergent variable and expects tendency in future (Huang, 2022). It is believed that in order for new organizations to be viable and sustainable in the following digital economy era, they must consider both their spiritual and physical needs (Bayighomog & Arasli, 2022). The caring behavior of leaders encourages employees to be loyal and engage in their daily routine (Yang et al., 2019b). Spiritual leaders increase the understanding of employees towards their job and also encourage positive and helping behavior with coworkers. Similarly, when employees are being treated well and are encouraged to work honestly, they will be motivated and would be engaged in their work (Fry and Kriger, 2009). Positive leadership style has significant impact on organizational performance (Aboramadan et al., 2022). Therefore, employees who work in such a positive environment with positive leadership style are anticipated their dedication towards their responsibilities and are suggested adding more empirical evidence (e.g., Alafeshat & Aboud, 2019). Thus,

H<sub>1</sub>: Spiritual leadership has significant relationship with employee job engagement.

## **2.2 Psychological Empowerment and Work Engagement**

Individuals' perception of their job duties and their ability to influence employment outcomes are referred to as psychological empowerment (Whitman et al., 2013). Psychological empowered employees exhibit proactive behavior and believe that their work has purpose, are accountable for the outcomes, and they must prove their capability (Thomas, 1992). Employees who believe they have the necessary abilities to complete the task and who feel psychologically empowered are more likely to perform better than their coworkers (Liden et al., 2000). Though psychological empowerment has been described as a notion of motivation, its connection with job engagement, one of the basic concepts in motivation research, has not received much attention in the literature (Stander & Rothmann, 2010) and has also been revealed that a strong indicator of work engagement is psychological empowerment (Bhatnagar, 2012). Therefore,

H<sub>2</sub>: Empowerment has significant relationship with work engagement.

## **2.3 Mediating role of Psychological Empowerment**

Very few studies have highlighted the importance of psychological empowerment as a mediator between workplace antecedents and outcomes (Ahmed and Khalid, 2019). In the leadership context few studies have tested the mediating role of psychological empowerment between transformation leadership and commitment and job satisfaction (Avolio et al., 2004; Aydogmus et al., 2018); sustainable leadership and sustainable performance (Iqbal et al., 2020) yet, the mediating role of psychological empowerment between leadership styles and work outcomes are limited and needs more research studies (Ambad et al., 2021). It is assumed that when a leader may implement psychological empowerment by assigning tasks to followers in a way that nurtures their engagement and improves their performance. Based on the self-determination theory, Autonomy encourages pleasant psychological experiences and positive behavior (Deci and Ryan 2000).

According to Hu et al., (2018), employees who were higher on psychological empowerment were found more engaged in their work, exhibited discretionary behavior (Ghalavi & Nastiezaie 2020). Work engagement may be inspired by a sense of psychological empowerment. Employees who feel psychologically empowered will have greater levels of engagement and energy at work, which will result in more work engagement. Thus, it is expected that empowered employees who are working under spiritual leadership would be more active and engage in their work. Leaders want to arouse their followers' attention and motivate them to perform in a way that makes them willing to be engaged in their work (Giallonardo et al., 2010). It is vital to investigate that psychological empowerment will mediate the relationship between spiritual leadership and work engagement. Thus, following the above discussion, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H<sub>3</sub>: Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and work engagement.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Population and Sampling

For this study, the target population was the employees working in pharmaceutical companies located at Peshawar Industrial estates. Convenience sampling technique is a form of non-probability sampling technique that focuses on the collection of primary data from prospective respondents who are readily accessible. Focusing on the selected organization, this study followed purposive convenience technique. The justification for the selection of purposive sampling technique was that the employees were large in number and was not feasible to approach and record the responses of every employee. Further, the time frame was also limited and thus, purposive sampling technique was applied.

#### 3.2 Measures

All the items in the second part of the questionnaire were on a five-points Likert scale. The adopted questionnaires have been listed in table 1.

Table 1: Instruments

S.No	Variable	Number of Items
1.	Spiritual Leadership (Fry et al., 2005)	17
2.	Psychological Empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995)	12
3.	Work Engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002)	17

#### 3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Target population of this study was the employees working in Pharmaceuticals companies located in Peshawar Industrial Estate. Those employees were targeted who work in the offices and employees working in the production units were excluded. Before visiting the targeted companies prior permission was obtained and the employees were approached at their working hours. Two sources data was collected. To collect primary data, the targeted companies were personally visited and employees were requested to fill the survey form. Employees were requested to fill the questionnaire for the psychological empowerment and spiritual leadership. While managers were requested to fill the questionnaires regarding their employees work engagement. A cover letter describing the necessary information was included with the questionnaire, considering the ethical issues. Similarly, the respondents were provided the guarantee on the confidentiality of the information collected about them. Successively, the gathered data would be discarded upon the completion of the study. The participation was voluntary and the respondents were informed that they may quit the survey at any time.

A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed. The collected questionnaires were checked for missing data. 183 received questionnaires were dropped. The dropped questionnaires were not complete in all aspect. Discarding the incomplete questionnaires 310 questionnaires were used for analysis. The response rate thus was 62%.

Among the respondents, 84% of the employees were male. Regarding age group, most of the respondents i.e. 40% were in between 34-41 years of age. 77% of the employees were having 16 years of education.

### 4. Results

Table 2 exhibits correlation, Mean, SD and cronbach alpha of the study variables. The correlation coefficient between spiritual leadership and psychological empowerment was found 0.67 and was significant at 0.01. This provides the initial support the positive relationship between spiritual leadership and psychological empowerment. A positive correlation was observed between spiritual leadership and work engagement. The calculated value was 0.61 at  $p < 0.01$ . A significant variable was observed between psychological empowerment and work engagement. The calculated value was 0.66 which shows positive a relationship.

Mean value for the spiritual leadership was 4.24, for psychological empowerment 4.25 and for work engagement it was 4.25. Similarly, the standard deviation value for spiritual leadership was 0.395, for psychological empowerment 0.415 and for work engagement it was 0.412.

Similarly, the alpha value for the spiritual leadership was 0.89, for psychological empowerment 0.92 and for work engagement it was 0.94 and all the values were above the threshold value of 0.70, confirming the reliability of the scales adopted.

Table 2: Correlations, Mean, SD and Reliabilities

	SL	PE	WE	Mean	SD
SL	(0.89)			4.241	0.395
PE	0.67**	(0.92)		4.255	0.415
WE	0.611**	0.66**	(0.94)	4.258	0.412

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Reliabilities are in parentheses

The R<sup>2</sup> value for the relationship between spiritual leadership and work engagement was found 0.373. The beta value was found 0.611 explaining that 61 units changes will be observed in work engagement due to unit change in spiritual leadership. The value was above the threshold value and was found 13.52 at 0.01. The obtained results confirm the positive significant relationship between spiritual leadership and work engagement.

Hypothesis 2 stated that there is significant relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement. The results exhibited in table 3 shows that the R<sup>2</sup> value was 0.442. The beta value was 0.66, explains that 66 units changes will be observed due to one unit change in psychological empowerment. The t value was also in the acceptable range at 0.01. Thus, confirmed the positive relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement. The obtained results have been presented in table 3 given below.

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Predictor	Work Engagement			
	R <sup>2</sup>	β	t	Sig
Spiritual leadership	0.373	0.611	13.54	0.00
Psychological Empowerment	0.442	0.665	15.63	0.00

To test the mediating effect of psychological empowerment between spiritual leadership and work engagement, Preacher and Hayes (2004) bootstrapping technique was applied and the obtained results have been presented in table 4.

The total effect was 0.6379 at p<0.01 which was the sum of direct and indirect effect. The direct effect was 0.3123 and the indirect effect through psychological empowerment was 0.3256 at p<0.01. The impact was significant at both lower (0.0461, p<0.01) and upper level (0.4793, p<0.01). The ULCI and LLCI did not contain any zero and were in the same direction. This supported the hypothesis that the psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and work engagement.

Table 4: Mediation effect

Direct effect of X on Y						
	Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
	.3123	.0574	5.4427	.0000	.1994	.4251
Indirect effect of X on Y						
	Effect		Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	
Psy Emp	.3256		.1039	.0461	.4793	

#### **4.1 Discussion**

Spiritual leadership is rooted in a person's ethical behavior and honesty. It impacts the leader's choices and behaviors as well as own and their followers' well-being (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Spiritual leadership provides vision and commitment and the employees work hard to achieve that vision for their and organizational benefits and growth. The same is consistent with previous studies (Fry, 2003, Huang, 2022). Specifically, this study confirmed the hypothesized relationship in Pakistani context. Spiritual values-based leadership has a significant role in developing job engagement in both Asian and European cultures (Hunsaker & Jeong, 2020).

This study hypothesized that psychological empowerment and work engagement has significant influence. Work engagement has been reported that many causes, such as employee worry, downsizings, increasing workloads, and higher stress levels, have caused instability at work engagement (Blaique et al., 2023). High-resilience workers exhibit various positive traits, such as positivity and vitality (Waugh et al., 2008) which, as this study proved, have been reported to influence work engagement. The same has been tested in previous studies (Kimura, 2011; Blaique et al., 2023). The positive nature of psychological empowerment and control on one's job ultimately enhances work engagement (Seibert et al., 2011).

This study delivers the understanding of underlying mechanism through which spiritual leadership may impact the employee engagement. It was confirmed in this study that psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and work engagement. When supervisors provide the opportunity of effective utilization of skills and support enhances psychological empowerment, which in turn, increases work engagement (Quiñones et al., 2013). Spiritual leadership mobilizes personal resource (psychological empowerment). In doing so the motivation level of the employees increases and leads to positive work outcomes i.e. work engagement which is consistent with previous studies (Bhatnagar, 2012; Huang, 2022). Little is known to the mediating role of psychological empowerment and called for testing the mediating effect of leadership style related to positive work outcomes (Islam et al., 2023).

#### **4.2 Theoretical Contribution**

The current research brings contribution to the literature in leadership domain specifically spiritual leadership. Research on spiritual leadership is unclear and limited (Samul, 2024). Similarly, employees have been reported lower engagement in Pakistan (Bilal et al., 2021) due to various factors like leadership (Bhatti et al., 2018). This study was conducted in South Asia region particularly in Pakistan which validated the cultural context and enriches the literature in Pakistani context.

Another theoretical contribution of the study was exploring the mediating role of psychological empowerment between spiritual leadership and work engagement which has recently been called for testing (e.g. (Islam et al., 2023). Emotional and psychological behavior related to work engagement is has been better acknowledged (Huang, 2022). Unexpectedly, little attention has been given to the phenomena. Psychological empowerment provides pathways through which spiritual leadership is linked with employee engagement. This study expands theory by focusing on the roles of several techniques for regulating psychological empowerment and emotions during the spiritual leadership process and associated work outcomes.

#### **4.3 Practical Implications**

Employee engagement in organizations is positively impacted by the spiritual behavior of leaders, which has significant implications for both organizations and individuals. Managers may demonstrate an impressive and compelling vision to keep staff intact as a motivating factor to encourage staff members to perform better on the job. Similarly, supervisors ought to be compassionate with workers, particularly in times of difficulty or distress. Lastly, leaders should be honest and cooperative and be ready for employees to engage them in their work.

It is important to incorporate spiritual leadership in organizations. This approach positively impacts employee engagement at work, and psychological empowerment is an additional mediating factor. These results can shape evidence-based strategies to improve workers' work-related outcomes. Managers may find these results useful in understanding changes in workplace culture. This advises that the organizational culture may be designed in such a way that the employees may feel empowered who ultimately would involve in positive work behavior.

#### **4.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study is not without any limitation. The first limitation of the study was that the primary data was collected exclusively from one sector and the other sector may not provide homogeneous results. So the generalizability may be an issue. Therefore, replication is suggested to provide empirical understanding of spiritual leadership, psychological empowerment and work engagement from other sectors as well.

Another limitation of the study was that the variables were taken and tested as a uni-dimension. Other dimension may also be tested. For example, other construct may be used to assess spiritual leadership, like spiritual leadership inventory (Zhu et al., 2023) which may include several other spiritual leadership dimensions that may be more strongly correlated with work engagement. Future studies may consider other emerging leadership styles, for example, inclusive leadership (Thabet et al., 2023) and humor leadership (Siddiquei et al., 2023). This study was conducted in Pakistani culture. Culture orientation may result in different way. Therefore, as a managerial strategy, future studies should look further at the relationship between cultural orientations and psychological empowerment (Wen et al., 2023). Furthermore, other psychological variables such psychological breach contact (Islam et al., 2023) and psychological capital may be considered as mediating variable in leadership context and negative behavior (Tufail et al., 2024).

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