



## HOW DOES SPIRIT AT WORK DRIVE SELLING EFFORT? EVIDENCE FROM PHARMACEUTICAL SALESFORCE

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### ABSTRACT

Despite growing interest in workplace spirituality consequences, organizations are urged to better understand how workplace spirituality influences workplace behaviors (e.g. Fox, Webster & Casper, 2018). In this connection, this study proposes and empirically examines how individual-level workplace spirituality predicts selling effort via salesforce intrinsic motivation in Pharmaceutical companies in Pakistan to promote under-researched Muslim countries and its workplaces with diverse spiritual traditions than extensively studied Christian societies. Data were collected from field salespersons employed by pharmaceutical companies operating in the Lahore region of Pakistan to test hypothesized relationships. Findings indicate individual-level spirit at work drives selling effort above and beyond what is positively mediated by intrinsic motivation. This research endeavor improves the legitimacy of workplace spirituality and makes it mainstream to organizational studies which will prevent marginalization of research on this topic.

**KEYWORDS:** Workplace Spirituality, Effort, Intrinsic Motivation, Salesperson, Pharmaceutical Sector, Pakistan

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that spiritually based organizations cannot be a passing fashion, but rather need to be imperative for the third millennium (e.g., Vasconcelos 2015). Popular literature and media portrayals of workplace spirituality have also predominantly focused on large corporations and productivity (Driscoll, McIsaac & Wiebe, 2019). This provided the impetus for my research inquiry to examine the link between workplace spirituality and material gains for pharmaceutical organizations in developing economy like Pakistan with under-researched Muslim spiritual and religious traditions compared to extensively studied Christian spiritual traditions to promote spiritually diverse societies and workplaces (Driscoll, McIsaac & Wiebe, 2019). Working hard, working intensity or effort has attracted mounting attention from scholars and practitioners (Bell & Freeman, 2001; Burchell & Fagan, 2004; Burke, 2007; Ng, Sorensen & Feldman, 2007). This study is significant for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, we examine how spirit at work drives their selling effort which is a gap in the literature. The study of working hard is important for practical reasons because of its potential impact on individual well-being and productivity gains (Burke, Singh & Fiksenbaum, 2010) such as sales performance (e.g. Bodla & Naeem, 2014; Brown & Peterson 1994; Sujana et al., 1994). In this study, the major contention is that the spirit at work has the potential to nurture favorable attitudinal states (Cravens et al., 2004; Jaworski, 1988) such as intrinsic motivation and stimulate customer-centric selling behaviors (Guenzi et al., 2014; Flaherty & Pappas, 2012) such as selling effort by disciplining effect (Williamson, 1975; Alchian & Demsetz, 1972; Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Therefore the central objective of this research endeavor is to test hypothesized relationships among spirit at work, intrinsic motivation and selling effort as depicted in the model. Using the postulations of Self-Determination Theory (hereinafter SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991, 2001), hypothesized partial mediation model for this study is depicted as follows (see figure 1).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Relationship of spirit at work and intrinsic motivation

According to the self-determination theory (SDT), it presents a competitive perspective that intrinsic motivation is a contextually sensitive attitudinal state (e.g. Ryan & Deci, 2000) rather than an attitudinal trait. We argue that salesforce experience a higher level of intrinsic motivation when they are spirited at work (job level contextual factor) to satisfy their core psychological needs of autonomy, belongingness and competence. Therefore, the sales force is expected to experience a higher level of intrinsic motivation when autonomy-supportive, relationship-supportive and competence-supportive job level contextual conditions, such as spirit at work, which satisfies core psychological needs

of autonomy, relationship and competence. SDT and other recent theory developments in social psychological domain predict that intrinsic motivation is contextually sensitive attitudinal state (e.g. Ryan & Deci, 2000; Amabile & Kramer, 2011) and empirical evidence in its support is coming mostly from formal sales force control context (e.g. Miao & Evans, 2012, 2014; Miao et al., 2012). Based on prior empirical and theoretical evidence, the following relationship is expected:

*H<sub>1</sub>: The higher the salesperson's spirit at work, the greater the intrinsic motivation.*

## 2.2 Relationship of intrinsic motivation and selling effort

According to the theoretical prediction of the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1988, 1991), intrinsic motivational attitudinal state explains why salespersons put the intensified effort in the context of performance contingent rewards. So, the following relation is expected:

*H<sub>2</sub>: The higher the salesperson's intrinsic motivation, the greater the selling effort*

## 2.3 Relation between spirit at work and selling effort

In this study, we argue that spirit at work has the potential to stimulate customer-centric selling behaviors (Guenzi et al., 2014; Flaherty & Pappas, 2012) such as selling effort by disciplining effect (Williamson, 1975; Alchian & Demsetz, 1972; Jensen & Meckling, 1976).

*H<sub>3</sub>: The higher the salesperson's spirit at work, the greater the selling effort controlling for the effect of intrinsic motivation*

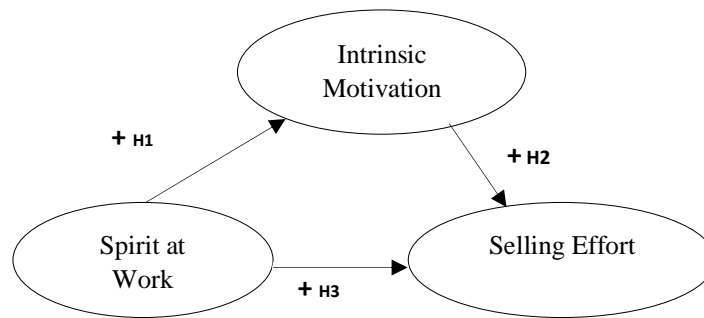


Fig. 1: Hypothesized Partial Mediation Model

## 3. RESEARCH METHODS

Survey questionnaires are administered to Pharmaceutical field salespersons of 25 national and multinational sales organizations in Pakistan (Lahore) using a sampling frame of Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Association (PPMA). Two hundred and fifty-eight usable questionnaires are obtained after multiple follow-ups. The majority of the respondent sample is male (96%), graduate (73%) and unmarried (66%). The average age and sales experience of salesforce is 27.70 years (standard deviation = 5.18 years) and 4.63 years (standard deviation = 3.30 years) respectively. Selling effort is operationalized as "to what extent sales force engage in persistent behaviors to achieve selling objectives and how long they expend energy on selling tasks" by using three indicators five-point Likert scale (Sujan et al., 1994) having extreme anchors "1" for "strongly disagree" and "5" for "strongly agree". In line with the conceptualization of intrinsic motivation advanced by social psychologists (Amabile & Kramer, 2011), intrinsic motivation construct in this study is defined as "the love of the work itself-doing the work because it is interesting, enjoyable, satisfying, engaging or personally challenging". Consistent with conceptual definition, extensively six items validated scale, adopted from Oliver and Anderson (1994), is employed to measure intrinsic motivation with extreme anchors "1" for "strongly disagree" and "5" for "strongly agree". The higher the scale score, the more the intrinsic motivation of salesforce. Spirit at work construct is measured at the individual level rather than work unit or organizational level considering. It consists of two dimensions of meaning at work and conditions in the



community. Meaning at work is measured by using six items that pertain to one of the dimensions of individual-level spirituality at work construct developed by Ashmos and Duchon (2000).

Condition for the community is measured by using nine items which is related to one of the dimensions of individual-level spirituality at work construct developed by Ashmos and Duchon (2000). A five-point Likert format with responses ranging from “1” for strongly disagree to 5 for “strongly agree” is used for each of the indicators of both dimensions of spirit at work measure. Reliability scores of all study measures met the acceptable threshold of 0.60 (Nunnally, 1967). Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure was used to test the partial mediating mechanism of intrinsic motivation for the relationship between spirit at work and selling effort by employing multiple regression analytical framework.

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

First, the effect of spirit at work was found to be positive (SPC = 0.47;  $p < 0.01$ ) on intrinsic motivation which confirms the expected relationship (H1). Second, as we proposed in H2, intrinsic motivation had significant positive impact on salesperson's selling effort (SPC = 0.11;  $p < 0.05$ ). Spirit at work was found to be positive (SPC = 0.43;  $p < 0.001$ ) on selling effort which confirms the expected relationship (H3). Findings indicate an indirect significant positive effect of spirit at work on selling effort in such a way that spirit at work nurtured intrinsic motivation, which in turn, improved selling effort. As the effect of spirit at work on selling effort was reduced (SPC: from 0.48 to 0.43) by controlling for the effect of intrinsic motivation, so intrinsic motivation partially mediated selling spirit at work-intrinsic motivation relationship. Table 1 shows a summary of the testing of hypothesized relationships among study constructs.

**Table 1: Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis #	Hypothesized Path	SPC (SE)	Conclusion
Total Effect Step 1	Spirit at Work + → Selling Effort (without controlling Intrinsic Motivation)	0.48***	Supported
H1: Step 2	a path: Spirit at Work + → Intrinsic Motivation	0.47** (0.072)	Supported
H2: Step 3	b path: Intrinsic Motivation + → Selling Effort (Controlling Spirit at Work )	0.11* (0.072)	Supported
H3: (Direct Effect) Step 4	Spirit at Work + → Selling Effort (by controlling Intrinsic Motivation)	0.43***	Supported

*SPC: Standardized Path Coefficient; SE: Standardized Error; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; Steps 1-4 are related to causal step approach proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) for testing mediation*

#### 5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, the major contention was tested successfully that the spirit at work has the potential to nurture favorable attitudinal states (Cravens et al., 2004; Jaworski, 1988) such as intrinsic motivation and stimulate customer-centric selling behavior (Guenzi et al., 2014; Flaherty & Pappas, 2012) such as selling effort by disciplining effect (Williamson, 1975; Alchian & Demsetz, 1972; Jensen & Meckling, 1976). The finding that spirit at work acts as driver of intrinsic motivation is in line with prior research (e.g., Deci et al. 1994; Reeve et al., 2002; Fried & Ferris, 1987; Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Steger et al., 2012). Findings of this research support consistent evidence observed by Vasconcelos (2018) about the suitable usage of spiritual resources. This result can be explained by using tenets of SDT that the informational aspect of meaning at work might have been more salient which provided cues of perceived supportive to the fulfillment of something important in salesforce lives such as their personal development and social contribution. Such autonomy-supportive perceptions carrying meaningful rationale fostered their intrinsic motivation and hence selling effort.

The results can also be interpreted using the postulations of customer stewardship and job enrichment theories that when salesforce perceive their job meaningful, they may engage in performing their selling responsibilities and take ownership and direct responsibility for handling customer problems and their welfare issues (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Schepers et al., 2012) which requires them to work for long hours and remain persistent until customer-related goals are not met. Management is suggested to conduct “Spirit at Work Audit” of their sales force periodically to assess to what extent sales force perceive their work meaningful, provide them opportunities to contribute to social good and develop quality connections with coworkers at the immediate workplace to reap the benefits of the intrinsically motivated and hard-working sales force. It is also advisable that sales management should facilitate the sales force to explore the rationale of their work to nurture perceived meaning of their work, as suggested by Ulrich and Ulrich (2010), which will make them not only intrinsically motivated to their selling tasks but also selling efforts which may result into their improved sales performance and job satisfaction. The patterns of meaning at work could also be nurtured by attracting and retaining sales force who view their work as “calling” rather than “job” or “career”. The study findings suggest some obvious lines of inquiry for future research. Future researchers should look for the role of other mediators to explain how spirituality drives sales persons selling efforts. A longitudinal research design may be employed to assess the validity of the findings of the present study. Diverse salesperson samples, selling services and products other than pharmaceutical products, can be used to examine the robustness of the study findings.

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