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Article

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MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Relating ethical leadership with work engagement: How workplace spirituality mediates?

Nosheen Adnan^{1*}, Omar Khalid Bhatti^{2,3} and Waqas Farooq⁴

Abstract: Throughout the 21st century, change has been a predominant theme in the workplace. Increased technology and globalization are two key contributors to the changing landscape. The costs of occupational health and well-being are increasingly being considered as sound “investments” as healthy and engaged employees yield direct economic benefits to the company. The concept of work engagement plays a vital role in this endeavour because engagement entails positive definitions of employee health and promotes the optimal functioning of employees within an organizational setting. The present article reviewed existing human resource management and leadership literature and then proposes a framework that links employee engagement, workplace spirituality and ethical leadership. Drawing on self-determination theory (SDT) that proffers workplace

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Nosheen Adnan is a PhD candidate at Iqra University, Islamabad-Pakistan. Her PhD thesis entitled “Understanding Employee work engagement in the presence of Ethical leadership and Workplace Spirituality; A phenomenological study” is presented in this paper. Ms Nosheen Adnan's research focuses on Human resource management.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The present paper analyzed existing human resource management and leadership literature and then proposes a framework that links employee engagement, workplace spirituality and ethical leadership. Given the importance of employee engagement, a key concern for organizations is how to promote the engagement of employees through ethical leadership and also workplace spirituality. Drawing on self-determination theory (SDT) that proffers workplace spirituality as an arbitrator in the relationship between employee work engagement and ethical leadership. A set of propositions that represent an empirically driven research agenda are presented. This study calls for more attention to the involvement of practices in societies and cultures where ethical leadership and workplace spirituality is binding.

spirituality as an arbitrator in the relationship between employee work engagement and ethical leadership. A set of propositions that represent an empirically driven research agenda are presented.

Subjects: Work & Organizational Psychology; Consumer Psychology; Business, Management and Accounting; Philosophy

Keywords: work engagement; workplace spirituality; ethical leadership; self-determination theory; conceptualization; literature review

1. Introduction

The unstable economic climate within which organizations are expected to function is characterized by factors such as globalization, unpredictable markets, downsizing, critical skills shortages, restructuring and so forth (Mafini et al., 2013). This causes disengagement in the workplace and has been the basis for concern in the business world. Estimates and surveys suggest that more than 70% of employees are either passively or actively disengaged (Adkins, 2015; Wilson, 2014) costing companies in the United States 450 USD to 550 billion USD annually (Baker, 2014). Employee disengagement is likely to lead to adverse effects such as diminished employee morale and productivity (Prencipe, 2001; Tritch, 2001), enhanced employee turnover, workplace accidents (Frank et al., 2004) and major financial losses (Brim, 2002; Gopal, 2006).

To address the issue of employees' engagement, researchers (like; Aquino et al., 1999; Harter et al., 2002; Colbert et al., 2004; Laschinger & Finegan, 2005; Laschinger & Leiter, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010) have started to investigate more distal predictors of work engagement—those that may predict job and can indirectly influence engagement (Alfes et al., 2013; Holman & Axtell, 2016). As of employee's strong dedication towards their job and work activities, engaged workers/employees show superior in-role task performance (Christian et al., 2011) leading to improved organizational financial outcomes (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). In addition, more than a few studies suggest that to improve employees work engagement leadership plays a key role (Breevaart et al., 2014; Tims et al., 2011; Tuckey et al., 2012). Effective leadership can harness openness towards new experiences, creativity, innovation, improvement, advancement and entrepreneurship (Costa et al., 2015; Gawke et al., 2017; Orth & Volmer, 2017; Tims & Bakker, 2013). Indeed, it is notable that individuals who are more engaged in their jobs are more original in their ideas and are likely to put extra efforts, so much so, they are more tactical and innovative (Orth & Volmer, 2017). In general, work engagement is viewed as managing discretionary effort in which employees act in a way that furthers or improves their organization's interests (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Costa et al., 2015; Gutermann et al., 2017; Tims & Bakker, 2013; Van Mierlo & Bakker, 2018).

As highlighted formerly, the changing business environment affects the overall understanding, motivation, commitment and well-being of employees (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Pawar, 2009). Certainly, in the fast-changing business environment, the overall fragmented work lives (where professional life is distinct from personal life) has a major negative influence, as it weakens one's sense of fullness and integration. (Milliman et al., 2003; Ramdass & Van Tonder, 2009; Rosso et al., 2010; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). In fact, it is thickly argued that it is possible to redeem manpower but it is difficult to procure employees' minds, souls, and hearts. And in context to the same, many organizations are interested in creating a spiritual work environment that can engage the hearts and minds of their employees (Altarawmneh & Al-Kilani, 2010; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Meyer & Gagne, 2008; Murray & Evers, 2011; Pfeffer, 2010). An organization's spirituality is reflected through spiritual value that is part of the organization's climate and culture, manifested within employees' attitudes and behaviour, decision-making, and resource allocation (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Kolodinsky et al., 2008; Pawar, 2008; Dhiman & Marques, 2016; Ng & Feldman, 2015).

Given the importance of employee engagement, a key concern for organizations is how to promote the engagement of employees through leadership and especially ethical leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009; Saks, 2011; Yammarino, 2013; Alfes et al. 2013; Benefiel et al., 2014; Caulfield & Senger, 2017). Ethical leadership is likely to have a significant influence on the overall relationship between the leader and the follower (Bellingham, 2003). Ethical leadership leads to a strong sway on organizational and top-management effectiveness, follower performance and job satisfaction (Eisenbeiss & Giessber, 2012). In addition to the effects of ethical leadership on followers, existing evidence also indicates that ethical leadership has implications for a broader set of employees' attitudes and behaviours such as work engagement (Chen et al., ; Ng & Feldman, 2015).

Research affirms that ethical leadership has a positive influence on work engagement (Tu & Lu, 2016; Treviño et al., 2014). However, with all said there is still a need to understand this phenomenon as past studies withal lack pragmatic grind in order to fully understand employee work engagement (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Rego & Pina E Cunha, 2008; Rigby & Ryan, 2018). In addition, the problem of workplace engagement after all prevails and is a key area of interest for academicians and practitioners. (Kumar et al., 2012; Nasir & Bashir, 2012; Majeed et al., 2018). The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The next section outlines the literature which is pertinent to the development of this study's propositions. Next, the study's propositions are documented, which are followed by concluding commentaries and avenues for future research

2. Theoretical framework

The present research grounds on Self Determination Theory (SDT) and its extended paradigm of dynamic capabilities of firms to propose a conceptual framework. The current high paced competitive environment does neither arbitrarily rule out firms failing to conform to the "must-have" industry-like structure as suggested by population ecologists (Hannan & Freeman, 1977) nor makes use of collusion and diseconomies of scale to boost profits as posited by industrial-organizational theorists (e.g., J. Bain, 1959; J. S. Bain, 1954). An ethical leader's concern for the best interests of subordinates, openness to input and fair decision making would enhance the experiencing of ethical leaders as trustworthy by their subordinates (Dadhich & Bhal, 2008; Eisenbeiss & Giessber, 2012; Johnson & Euler, 2012; Kalshoven et al., 2011; Purewal & van den Akker, 2009). Ethical leaders want to empower employees through training and support, and they want to provide freedom to their employees to show initiative through responsibility and authority, which leads to employee engagement in their work (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Macey et al., 2009). When the employees perceive the leaders as fair in the distribution of rewards and treatment of their efforts, trust in the leaders will increase that would lead to a climate in which employees are engaged in their work (Chughtai & Buckley, 2011; Giallonardo et al.,).

2.1. Self determination theory, work engagement and ethical leadership

Self-determination theory (SDT) was postulated in the year 1985 by Deci and Ryan, and since its inception, this theory has been used in different domains; which includes sports, economics, and education domain. Self-determination theory has a central principle: which holds that humans, as functioning organisms, have an inbuilt need, so, therefore, moves toward, psychological growth (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Before you could be referred to as self-determinant, you must engage in an activity with a full sense of wanting, choosing, and personal endorsement. These inbuilt needs can be divided into three categories: relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Competence can be referred to as the confidence in one's abilities (Ryan & Deci, 2000a), and also the need to feel useful in one's surrounding, the feeling of efficiency when one attempts to interact with their world (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). An individual can achieve a proper feeling of competence, through either competition with others or with oneself, and this could be as a result of increased intrinsic motivations.

The feeling of belonging to a social group or unit is referred as Relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000a), also the act of feeling linked to and having care for other people (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004).

Relatedness is also a causal factor for boosts in intrinsic motivations in an individual; for instance, children who enjoy feelings of relatedness from family and friends frequently show higher intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2003).

The ability to self-regulate one's behaviours and actions in the process of achieving proposed goals is referred to as Autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Autonomy frequently displays itself in one's abilities to "act in accord with [one's] integrated sense of self" (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). Every individual experience varying motivation based on their opinioned relationship to the three domains. Due to this fact, individuals may experience motivation ranging on a scale from motive to intrinsic motivation. According to Ryan and Deci (2000b), intrinsic motivation could refer to the performance of a job/task because one discovers that it is enjoyable or done in pursuit of a particular set of goals. While extrinsic motivation is the performance of a job/task with the expectation that doing so will result in some exterior rewards, in the form of monetary gain or the acceptance by one's peers (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Therefore, people may find themselves more or less motivated to accomplish some particular goals based on the source of their motivations or the fulfilment of their domains over time (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). As individuals move from motivation to intrinsic motivation levels, their interest, and experience in a particular circumstance change. For instance, an individual who is experiencing fatigue may feel forced by outside forces (such as employers or social pressure) to carry out a particular task; thus, their emotions in relations to the task will be negative (Koestner & Losier, 2002). Also when the need for psychological growth and fulfilment is obstructed, or unfulfilled, symptoms such as substance abuse or the creation of a substitute ego/personality might be the case (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). This study builds on these concepts by stipulating how Work engagement, Workplace Spirituality, and Ethical Leadership can lead to greater performance and competitive advantage.

2.2. Work engagement

Many business surveys have reported a lack of trust and participation in the workforce (Federman, 2009). Kahn (1990) initiated the phrase, work engagement. He stated that people feel engaged with their work when they "express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally" while working (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). On the contrary, disengagement occurs when people "withdraw themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally" when working (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). Interestingly, the degree of work engagement or disengagement depends on the employees' answers to three questions: "(1) How meaningful is it for me to bring myself to this performance? (2) How safe is it to do so? and (3) How available am I to do so?" (Kahn, 1990).

Over the years a number of explanations and definitions have been presented while classifying work engagement (see Table 1). Kahn defined engagement based on the work of Goffman (1961), Maslow (1970), Alderfer (1972), and Hackman and Oldham (1980). Engagement consists of three dimensions:

- (1) Meaningfulness, sense of return on investments of self in role performance;
- (2) Safety, feeling of being able to show and employ self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career;
- (3) Availability, sense of possessing the physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary for investing self in role performances (Kahn, 1990, p. 705).

To enhance work engagement, an organization should create work to be more meaningful by providing challenging, creative, autonomous, and variety in work, build nonthreatening and consistent social situations to ensure safety and provide sufficient resources to ensure availability (Kahn, 1990). Giving work meaningfulness is a central concept of workplace spirituality (Neck &

Table 1. Definitions for work engagement

Definition of Work engagement	Authors, years
The harnessing of organizational members selves to their work roles, in engagement people, employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance.	Kahn (1990)
An energetic state of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance cores sense of professional efficacy(from burnout literature).	Leiter & Maslach (1998)
A persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment in employees that is characterized by high levels of motivation and pleasure.	Maslach et al. (2001)
The individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work.	Harter et al. (2002)
Employee engagement is the amount of "Discretionary effort" in the form of extra time, brainpower or energy that employees exhibit at work.	Watson (2003)
The extent to which employees commit to something or someone in the organization and how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment.	Corporate Leadership Council (2004)
A distinct and unique construct that consists of the cognitive, emotional and behavioural component that is associated with individual role performance.	Saks (2006)
Employee engagement is a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job organization, manager, or coworker that in turn influences him/her to apply an additional discretionary effect to his/her work.	Gibbons (2006)
The employee sense of purpose and focused energy that is evident to others through the display of personal initiative, adaptability, effort and persistence directed towards the organization's goals.	Macey et al. (2009)
Employee engagement encompasses three dimensions, rational(how well employees understand their roles and responsibilities), emotional(how many occasions they bring to their work and their organizations)and motivational (how willing they are to invest discretionary effort to perform their roles well).	T. Watson (2009)
The extent to which employees share their company's values feel pride in working for their company is committed to working for their company and have a favourable perspective of their work environment.	Watson (2010)

Source: Adapted from Welbourne & Schlachter (2014)

Milliman, 1994; Mahoney et al., 1999; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Milliman et al., 2003; Dehler et al., 2001; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004; Petchsawang & Duchon, 2009).

To ensure safety, a feeling of connection to each other, and being in a community is very important. When people can express themselves freely at the spiritual level, it will result in a feeling of safety. Therefore, drawing from Kahn's (1990) work engagement concept, workplace spirituality potentially relates to work engagement. Although, Kahn aptly conceptualized work engagement, he did not formulate a measurement for it. Schaufeli et al. (2002) developed a short self-report questionnaire (The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale: UWES) to measure work engagement which inheres three dimensions: vigour, dedication, and absorption. Engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behaviour. (Schaufeli et al., 2006, p. 5). It was the work by Schaufeli et al. (2006) which helped to distinguish the psychological state of engagement that had previously been unsuccessful in connecting the popular satisfaction surveys with the state of engagement. There is significant relevance as to why Schaufeli et al., (2006) focused on three key elements as they relate to employee engagement: Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working ... Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance ... absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2006, p. 702).

Additionally, vigor encompasses a willingness to invest in one's work in a tireless manner, even when facing difficulty, which effectively creates a positive emotional state within an individual. As

outlined, dedication includes a sense of significance that leads to a feeling of enthusiastic pride while performing a task; it is the ongoing pride and inspiration one has in one's job. Lastly, absorption is that persistent commitment to a task in which time appears irrelevant and in turn, makes it difficult for one to detach from their work when one is not physically at work (Alarcon et al., 2011; Schaufeli, 2012; Van den Berg et al., 2013). Schaufeli et al (2006) argues that the concept of work engagement is to embrace commitment and responsibility, encouraging employees' high level of energy, meaningfulness, and high concentration on their work is very important. Mindfulness meditation might play a vital role to help employees achieve concentration on their work (absorption, a dimension of work engagement). Additionally, practising spirituality by focusing moment by moment, being in the present, and letting distracting thoughts go will, we expect, help people to prepare their mind to be calm, powerful, and ready for work (Payutto, 2002).

Powerful minds, as anticipated through research, will help them to solve problems and face difficulties. That is a crucial part of work engagement, vigour. Finally, assisting people to find their work meaningful will promote work engagement, primarily through dedication or meaningfulness, a dimension of work engagement. The question, "Is work engagement the same concept as other organizational behaviours?" has been debated among researchers, who question whether work engagement is a redundant concept of other organizational behaviour concepts, such as job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational commitment, and OCBs (Little & Little, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006). Researchers do agree that those organizational behaviour constructs are related to the concept of work engagement; however, the focus of work engagement differs from these other constructs (Albrecht, 2010; Little & Little, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006). Although some empirical evidence suggests that engagement and job satisfaction have a profoundly positive correlation (Abraham, 2012) and that they are different concepts.

The job satisfaction concept focuses on a positive attitude resulting from job experiences, but engagement is above and beyond pure satisfaction due to its components of passion, enthusiasm, and commitment (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Indeed, testing the measurement model via structured equation modelling (SEM) suggests that engagement and job satisfaction are separate factors (Alarcon & Lyons, 2011). Job involvement is described as individuals absorbed in thought about their work. In addition to job involvement, work engagement concentrates not only on the cognitive level but also on the emotional and behavioural levels (Saks, 2006). Organizational commitment is a psychological state of attaching, belonging, and committing to an organizational goal and affective commitment can be counted as only one part of the state of engagement, but not the full state of engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). OCB includes voluntary behaviours to help co-workers and the willingness to go above and beyond formal obligations (Little & Little, 2006).

Many scholars have investigated the antecedents and consequences of work engagement and found that the precursors of work engagement include perceived organizational support and job characteristics (Saks, 2006); high job autonomy and low time pressure (De Spiegelaere et al., 2014); organizational role stress and high-performance work practices (Garg, 2015); service climate, job satisfaction, and affective commitment (Barnes & Collier, 2013); regulatory, supervisory, and social support (Freeney & Fellenz, 2013); job resources (Klusmann et al. 2008; de Lange et al., 2008; Kühnel et al., 2012; Timms & Brough, 2013); transformational leadership (Vincent-Höper et al., 2012); LMX (Agarwal et al. 2012; Matta et al., 2015); authentic leadership and employee trust (Hsieh & Wang, 2015); perceived line manager behaviour and human resource management practices (Alfes et al., 2013); and ethics environment and organizational trust (Hough et al., 2015).

Steering further, work engagement has a significant effect on important organizational outcomes, both positive and negative, such as career commitment and adaptability (Barnes & Collier, 2013); organizational commitment, job satisfaction, intention to quit, and OCB (Matta et al., 2015; Saks, 2006); emotional exhaustion (Klusmann et al. 2008); actual turnover (De Lange et al., 2008); turnover intention and employee deviant behaviours (Shantz et al., 2016); employees' occupational success (Vincent-Höper et al., 2012); innovative work behaviour, and intention to quit (Agarwal et al., 2012);

creative work behaviour and task performance (Alfes et al., 2013) and performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010). Furthermore, while the antecedents of work engagement have been studied widely, no identified research has empirically linked work engagement and workplace spirituality. The purity of mind and heart is the basis for a healthy life (Pawar, 2008).

2.3. Workplace spirituality

As per the earlier studies (like; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Pawar, 2008; Roof, 2015) theory development in the workplace spirituality (WS) is at a formative stage. However, the workplace spirituality concept is not a new idea as it has been grounded in the perspective of organization and management theory (Driscoll & Wiebe, 2007). For example, Hackman & Oldham (1980) and Parboteeah & Cullen (2003) affirmed that workplace spirituality, regarding meaning at work, is related to (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) job characteristics model. However, it goes beyond the character of interesting and satisfying work to the spiritual view of work, which involves searching for deeper meaning, purpose and feeling good about one's work.

The concept of WS has been defined and applied in different ways in the existing literature (see table 2). This extensive and varied use of the concept makes it difficult to find a unique definition (Tischler et al., 2002). Some experts have argued that the understanding of WS stems from organizational culture (Daniel, 2010; Leigh, 1997). This view of WS as an element of organizational culture gives important details regarding the role that the employee and the organization play in the development of a spiritual workplace. As per the present research following the definition of workplace spirituality is been used as workplace spirituality can be understood through three perspectives: individual, organizational and interactive.

At the individual level, WS can be seen as how the person brings his/her own set of spiritual ideas and values to the workplace. At the organizational level, WS can be viewed as an individual's perception of the spiritual values in the organization. The interaction perspective involves the relationship between a person's values and those provided in the organization. "A framework of organizational values that are evidenced in the culture that promotes employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in

Table 2. Definitions of workplace spirituality

Definition of Workplace Spirituality	Authors, years
Spirituality in the workplace is about seeing work as a spiritual path, as an opportunity to grow personally and to contribute to society in a meaningful way.	Neal, 1997.
Recognition of employee's inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work, and takes place in the context of community.	Ashmos & Duchon, 2000.
A journey toward integration of work and spirituality which provides direction, wholeness, and connectedness at work.	Gibbons, 2000.
Positively sharing, valuing, caring, respecting, acknowledging, and connecting the talents and energies of employees in meaningful goal-directed behaviour that enables them to belong, be creative, be personally fulfilled, and take ownership in their combined destiny.	Adams & Csiernik, 2002.
Involves the desire to do purposeful work that serves others, to be part of a principled community, a yearning for connectedness and wholeness that can only be manifested when one is allowed to integrate one's inner life with one's professional role in the service of the greater good.	Ashar & Lane-Maher, 2004.
An experience of interconnectedness initiated by authenticity, reciprocity, and personal goodwill; a deep sense of meaning that is inherent in the organization's work, resulting in greater motivation and organizational excellence.	Marques et al., 2007.
Aspects of the workplace that promote feelings of satisfaction through transcendence; a work process that facilitates employees' sense of being connected to a nonphysical force beyond themselves, that provides feelings of completeness and joy.	Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010.

Source: Adapted from (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014)

a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy” (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003, 2010, p. 137). Additionally, the spirituality concept has adopted motivation theory, as in Maslow, (1970) hierarchy of needs. Fulfilling people’s spiritual needs is comparable to accomplishing the highest level of human needs, as in self-actualization (Maslow, 1970). Moreover, according to self-determination theory, nurture of human needs is vital for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being” (Ryan and Deci, 2000a).

Although workplace spirituality has been studied for several decades, there is still a lack of a clear consensus on definition. (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004; Roof, 2015). The meaning of workplace spirituality can be separated into three camps: individual experience, organizational facilitation, and a mix of personal experience and corporate facilitation. For the first camp, workplace spirituality is described as the individual’s experience of energy, joy, and awareness of alignment between one’s values and one’s meaningful work, a sense of connection to others, something more significant than self, and transcendence (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004).

Second, workplace spirituality is interpreted as organizational facilitation of employees’ spirituality at work. Giacalone & Jurkiewicz (2003, p. 13) discussed spirituality in an organization context as “a framework of organizational values evidence in the culture that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness environments to treat their employees as a whole being at the spiritual level“.

Last, the focus of workplace spirituality definition includes the mix of individual experience and organizational context. Ashmos & Duchon (2000, p. 137) defined workplace spirituality as “the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community”. Milliman et al., (2003) constituted a spiritual workplace scale based on Ashmos & Duchon(2000) scale. And defined a spiritual workplace as one in which individuals have experienced meaningful community work and alignment with organizational values.

Researchers have provided empirical evidence that workplace spirituality, as a mix of individual experience and organizational context, is positively correlated with important organizational variables, such as job satisfaction (Altaf & Awan, 2011; Gupta et al., 2014; Pawar, 2009), job involvement (Milliman et al., 2003; Pawar, 2009), organizational commitment (Gatling et al., 2016; Kazemipour et al., 2012; Milliman et al., 2003; Pawar, 2009), intrinsic work satisfaction, organization-based self-esteem (Milliman et al., 2003), innovative work behaviour (Afsar & Rehman, 2015), and knowledge sharing behaviour (Rahman et al., 2015) and negatively correlated with organizational deviant behaviours (V. Chawla, 2014), stress (Daniel, 2015), intention to quit (Gatling et al., 2016; Milliman et al., 2003) and engagement (vigor, dedication, but not absorption) (Roof, 2015).

Withal, workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between job overload and job satisfaction (Altaf & Awan, 2011). Kazemipour et al., (2012) revealed that active organizational commitment mediated the effect of workplace spirituality on organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and engagement. Finally, workplace spirituality positively affects performance (Ashmos & Duchon, 2005; Osman-Gani et al., 2013; Petchsawang & Duchon, 2009). Ashmos & Duchon (2000) studied the effect of spirituality on work unit performance, measured by patient satisfaction as the critical indicator identified by the healthcare network.

Osman-Gani et al., (2013) examined the link between religiosity and spirituality in employee performance, measured by performance measures by Sarmiento et al., (2007), with performance data collected from employees, peers, and supervisors. Petchsawang & Duchon(2009) employed a quasi-experimental design showing that practising meditation partially mediated the relationship between workplace spirituality (at the individual level) and work performance as determined by supervisor evaluation. Beside performance at the employee and work unit levels. Albuquerque

et al. (2014) empirically reported that spirituality positively affects performance at the organization level. In the same context Benefiel et al. (2014) extensively reviewed that spirituality is positively related to productivity and performance across cultures and countries.

In conclusion, while several have studied workplace spirituality, only a hand picked empirical studies have examined the relationship between individual spirituality and worked engagement and found the statistically significant association of spirituality with some components of engagement (Roof, 2015). Workplace spirituality is seen as a multi-faceted construct influencing an individual's intrinsic motivation (Sharma & Hussain, 2012) and as involving one's "inner consciousness" and search for meaning (Houghton et al., 2016). A key theme of the literature on workplace spirituality is that people desire to not just be competent in their work, but also to have some other kind of personally meaningful experience at work. This type of experience can involve a variety of aspects such as a sense of transcendence, meaningful and purposeful work, a connection to others or to a higher power, the experience of one's "authentic" self, being of service to others or to humanity, and belonging to a competent and ethical organization (Milliman et al.,). Benefiel et al., (2014) observed that workplace spirituality is seen as providing new insights into employee work engagement and that a full understanding of organizational reality is incomplete without considering people's spiritual nature.

2.4. Ethical leadership

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) perceives people learn norms and proper behaviours by taking note of the behaviours of others who are credible and attractive. Various scholars have postulated that the ethical behaviours of leaders could directly influence efforts to foster positive, value-driven behaviours in employees (Burns, 1978; Bedi et al., 2016). A number of leadership constructs, such as transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass et al., 1987), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) consist of elements that are related to ethics (see table 3). But, these constructs pay attention solely on a range of leadership behaviours that are part of the clear ethical components, and also may not fully unfold the effects of the ethical practices and choices of leaders and how those behaviours affect employees (Brown & Treviño, 2006a).

In contrast, ethical leadership pays attention to various behaviours with an ethical, conceptual focus. Ethical leaders represent integrity and so, therefore, establish and implement ethical standards set for them and their subordinates (Bandura, 1977; Brown & Treviño, 2006), due to this fact, leaders at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy can learn and internalize the ethical values and standards of higher-level leaders.

Ethical leadership is most commonly defined in view of the fact that ethical leaders should demonstrate normatively appropriate conduct, and ethical leadership is distinguished from other styles of leadership by the emphasis on moral governance (Brown & Treviño, 2006), i.e. communication of moral codes (Van Gils et al., 2015). (2006) (2015). Brown & Treviño, (2006) split the concept of morality into two dimensions—the moral person and moral manager. The moral person dimension describes the personal characteristics of the manager. Ethical leaders are often perceived as trustworthy and honest individuals that make fair and substantiated decisions in their professional and private life. "The demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making" (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005, p. 120).

Improving the desirable behavior of subordinate employees and decrementing their harmful behavior through a role modeling process is achieved by internalizing values and standards within lower-level managers, which have been referred to as the "trickle-down" or "cascading" effects of leadership (Bass et al., 1987). Research has provided empirical proof for the result of high-level moral leadership on the ethical behaviours of lower-level leaders, that helps to support the existence of cascading effects (Mayer et al., 2009; Ruiz et al., 2011).

Table 3. Overlap and distinction between ethical leadership and related constructs

Leadership style	Parallels with Ethical leadership	Divergence from Ethical leadership
Transformational Leadership	Overcoming self-interest	Transformational leadership follows
Servant Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern for others • Role modelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economical motivation, first handedly • Transformational leadership emphasizes the role of vision • Ethical leadership incorporate “transactional” behavioural patterns (e.g., accentuating ethical standards)
Authentic leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical decision making • Role modelling • Integrity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical leadership exceeds sole employee orientation • Ethical leadership emphasizes other awareness; authentic leadership self-awareness • Ethical leadership incorporates “transactional” behavioural pattern (e.g., accentuating ethical standards) • Ethical leadership less related to authenticity

Source: Adapted from (Welbourne & Schlachter, 2014)

These studies have mainly focused on the effect of top managerial leadership styles on organizational outcomes, but have not fully established the mediating processes, moderating variables, or boundary conditions. Previous studies have also relied on the ratings of general employees in measuring the ethical behaviour of leaders. Such practices can obscure the trickling-down of ethical leadership across organizational layers during the influencing process (Mayer et al., 2009; Ruiz et al., 2011). Ethical leadership across the organizational hierarchy might be most accurately measured by assessing the perceptions that direct subordinates have about their leaders across multiple leadership levels. Therefore, to ascertain the effects of multi-layered Ethical leadership on performance, the field requires further studies constructed to identify the major variables of the influencing process and that use an appropriate strategy for testing these subtleties. This can pose a potent barrier to productivity and team performance (Erez & Somech, 1996; Steiner, 1972). Thus, ethical leadership with its strong normative implications for promoting behaviours with positive impacts on collective organizational outcomes provides a promising area of study for this inquiry.

Additionally, in social learning processes, individuals may respond differently to role models depending on the types and strengths of their motives. Indeed, the differential levels of subordinates' specific motives are associated with differential levels of their adherence to an imitation of ethical leadership behaviours (Brown & Treviño, 2006a). Accordingly, the strength of low-level leaders' learning and imitation of the ethical behaviours of high-level leaders can vary (Mayer et al., 2009). Among various core social motives, the self-enhancement motive involves the improvement of one's self-image (Yun et al., 2007) and has been found to deliver a substantial impact on the social learning process (Fisk et al., 2003; Yun et al., 2006). As such, this motive may serve as a potential moderator for the trickle-down process of ethical leadership that involves social learning. However, the extant literature on the cascading effect of leadership has focused on the influence of certain extraneous factors, such as the general structure climate (Ling et al., 2016; Mawritz et al., 2012; Shin, 2012) on the transmission process. (Mayer et al., 2010, 2009; J. M. Schaubroeck et al., 2012; Ruiz et al., 2011).

3. Methods: propositions and theorem development

3.1. Ethical leadership and work engagement

The relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement When employees are treated in a fair and respectful way by their leaders, they are likely to think about their relationship with their leader in terms of social exchange (Blau, 1964) rather than economic exchange. Furthermore, they are likely to reciprocate by putting extra effort into their work, through enhanced job dedication (Brown et al.,) and willing to become more actively engaged in work (Macey et al., 2009). When an employee has the freedom to make decisions and take action without consulting the supervisor all the time, it can result in work engagement (Macey et al., 2009). Bellingham, (2003) states that ethical leaders want to empower employees through training and support and they want to provide freedom to their employees to show initiative through responsibility and authority.

Ethical leaders take their followers into consideration and through open communication (Brown & Treviño, 2006) make it clear what the organization's goals are and what is expected from subordinates, which leads to employee engagement in their work (Macey et al., 2009). Brown et al., (2005) found a positive correlation between ethical leadership and job dedication, which is a major element of work engagement. Through regression analysis, Den Hartog & Belschak, (2012) confirmed that ethical leadership has a positive relationship with work engagement. They found that followers tend to report higher engagement in their work when they perceive their leaders as acting ethically. Consequently, the following can be postulated:

Proposition 1: Ethical leadership will positively influence Work Engagement

3.2. Ethical leadership and workplace spirituality

Ethical leadership is derived from two words; ethics and leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006). The combination of these two words brings a very clear and understandable meaning of ethical leadership. According to (Brown, Trevino & Harrison, 120), ethical leadership refers to the way of conducting oneself in a manner that is acceptable in terms of personal actions and the way one relates to others. It also involves superior actions that can be imitated by others in society, making informed decisions and being in a position to receive information appropriately. The possible relationship between workplace spirituality and ethical leadership could be brought about by the results that ethical leadership bears (Brown & Treviño, 2006). These could include increased decision making, increased social behaviour and a decreased number of unproductive behaviours.

As discussed earlier, ethical leadership and workplace spirituality have a relationship but this relationship need to be further explored in future research. This is because when keenly looked at, these two aspects have mixed results (Ayoum et al., 2015; Lowery et al., 2014). This brings a concern for future review of how ethical leadership impacts workplace spirituality.

Proposition 2: Ethical leadership will positively influence Workplace Spirituality

3.3. Workplace spirituality and employee work engagement

According to spillover theory, when people are satisfied with their spiritual life, their satisfaction spills over to their work-life (Kolodinsky et al., 2008). Then, when they are happy at work, they are more engaged in their work. Additionally, fostering spirituality in the workplace potentially influences employees' positive perceptions of their organization. Indeed, when employees perceive that their organization supports the cultivation of their spiritual well-being, they are likely to put more effort into their performance and be more engaged (Saks, 2006). Allowing employees to reach their own spirituality drives them to attain high potential, which results in leveraging their intrinsic motivation, creativity, and commitment and leads to greater engagement in work (Osman-Gani et al., 2013; Pawar, 2009). Kahn, (1990) showed that, when employees are allowed

to express themselves at work and are given room to utilize their full capacities, they will be more engaged in their work.

In conclusion, a potential way that workplace spirituality promotes work engagement can be explained through spiritual employees finding their work to be meaningful, and meaningfulness will drive them to be more engaged in their work. It can also be argued that workplace spirituality is positively correlated with important organizational variables that are related to work engagement, such as job satisfaction (Altaf & Awan, 2011; H. Lee et al., 2003; Pawar, 2009), job involvement (Milliman et al., 2003; Pawar, 2009), and organizational commitment (Kazempour et al., 2012; Milliman et al., 2003; Pawar, 2009). Although prior research has theoretically suggested that workplace spirituality increases engagement, no strong empirical research has yet supported this claim.

Proposition 3: Workplace spirituality will positively influence work engagement

3.4. Workplace spirituality mediates ethical leadership and work engagement

According to Ng & Feldman (2015), meta-analytically documented the link between ethical leadership and attitudes and behaviours such as job satisfaction, commitment, organizational identification, task performance, and engagement. Extant research indicates that the heightened interest in promoting ethical leadership is warranted because ethical leadership increases employees' ability to deal with conflict situations (Babalola et al., 2018) and reduces employee misconduct (Mayer et al., 2010), employees' unethical cognitions and behaviours (Schaubroeck et al., 2012), and unit unethical behaviour (Mayer et al., 2012).

Albrecht (2010) argued that positive psychology interventions that promote gratitude and nurture social relationships help develop work engagement. Indeed, acts of kindness towards others stimulate reciprocal relationships with co-workers that result in employee engagement in work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2010). Spiritual interventions, such as meditation, yoga, and contemplative prayer, help individuals achieve a sense of inner peace that can be immune to negative things in their organization and help create feeling of community (Kolodinsky et al., 2008; Shapiro et al., 1998) improved perceptions, changed behaviours, and improved relationships with co-workers and supervisors (Tischler et al., 2002).

Moreover, work engagement is not only about working hard and having a high degree of involvement but also about putting oneself to work and caring about what is done (Kahn, 2010). To put forth that effort, engagement requires being present in doing work (Kahn, 2010). Being present in the moment involves mindfulness, which is a result of practising meditation regularly (Heaton et al., 2004). Concentrating on being present enables employees to observe their actions, understand their problems, focus on others, and build a connection with others; then, they will engage in their work (Federman, 2009). The literature suggests that to improve work engagement, one needs to be aware of his or her thoughts, feelings, and actions without judgment (Van Berkel et al., 2014). Indeed, practising spirituality maximizes or optimizes engagement in organizational settings at the individual level. However, there is a need to conduct a systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of thought on work engagement to understand the relationship fully. Indeed, when employees perceive that their organization supports the cultivation of their spiritual well-being, they are likely to put more effort into their performance and be more engaged (Saks, 2006).

Allowing employees to reach their spirituality drives them to attain high potential, which results in leveraging their intrinsic motivation, creativity, and commitment and leads to greater engagement in work (Osman-Gani et al., 2013; Pawar, 2009). Kahn, (2010) showcased that, when employees are allowed to express themselves at work and are given room to utilize their full capacities, they will be more engaged in their work. In conclusion, a potential way that workplace spirituality promotes work engagement can be explained through spiritual employees finding their job to be meaningful, and meaningfulness will drive them to be more engaged in their work.

Indeed, living according to one's spirit or true self-sustains happiness, including employees' work engagement (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2010). Additionally, having good relationships with co-workers also helps promote engagement (Kahn, 2010). From a practical perspective, the ability to have compassion toward others is the key to engagement (Federman, 2009). Kazemipour et al., (2012) maintained that, when employees feel connected with co-workers, they engage in transcendence, which is more important than materialism. Transcendence leads them to participate in their work and to work intensely (absorption). The more they find their work meaningful, the more enthusiastically they work (dedication) and the more energy they have to get through the difficulties in their work (vigor) therefore, and work engagement.

Past studies also advocate that workplace spirituality is positively correlated with important organizational variables that are related to work, such as job satisfaction (Altaf & Awan, 2011; H. Lee et al., 2003; Pawar, 2009), job involvement (Milliman et al., 2003; Pawar, 2009), and organizational commitment (Kazemipour et al., 2012; Milliman et al., 2003; Pawar, 2009). Although prior research has theoretically suggested that workplace spirituality increases engagement, no strong empirical research has yet supported this claim with the effect of ethical leadership (Tu et al., 2017).

Proposition 4: Workplace Spirituality mediates the relationship between Ethical leadership and Work Engagement

4. Discussion and future research direction

4.1. Discussion

Superior organizational performance is crucial for the success of organizations according to industry 4.0 literature. (Abubakar et al., 2017). The following paper proposes a framework that includes Ethical leadership, Workplace Spirituality and Work engagement as a key to engaging competent employees. Ethical leadership has been suggested to influence employee and organizational outcomes. However, research focusing on ethical leadership effects on employee work engagement are limited (Chughtai et al., 2015; Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015; Engelbrecht et al., 2017). This study proposes that when employees are the recipients of the acts of ethical leader, they respond to this with higher work engagement. Furthermore, this study examines the mediating role of workplace spirituality in the relationship between ethical leadership and employee work engagement. First, it builds upon previous workplace spirituality and engagement studies (Petchsawang & McLean, 2017; Sharma & Hussain, 2012) which provided important insights into the relationship between these two constructs, but also contain some limitations. In relation to Petchsawang & McLean(2017), our investigation uses three dimensions of workplace spirituality that have been found to be key sources of work meaning as noted by Rosso et al., (2010). As a result, the current study contributes to the literature in establishing how multiple aspects of workplace spirituality can influence engagement through the lens of work meaning.

Research conducted earlier was mostly focused on examining the relationship between workplace spirituality and engagement at work. The studies were empirical in nature focusing on the two constructs in connection with employees' attitude at the workplace. The results of these studies add value to the literature by demonstrating the role of workplace spirituality in relations organizational behaviour and performance, hence further strengthening the theory of workplace spirituality. Research study results depicted that ethical leadership has an affirmative and positive influence on the engagement of an employee at the workplace. In the same context, the results also revealed the role of workplace spirituality as a mediator between the two constructs i.e., ethical leadership and employee work engagement.

Current research study proposes a framework with due consideration on theoretical implications for ethical leadership, workplace spirituality and employee work engagement. The study focuses on the intangible role of workplace spirituality as mediator hence linking ethical leadership and

employee work engagement for yielding superior organizational performance. The study further makes a contribution to the literature by bringing an in-depth understanding of the fundamental contrivance in which ethical leadership is related to work engagement of employees. The construct of the study is key assets to a superior organizational performance by fostering a healthy and endured environment at the workplace in due course of time.

Findings of the study depict that the leaders are the source of motivation and boost the feel of workplace spirituality within the employees through demonstrating ethical leadership behaviours, hence leading the employees' enhanced engagement at the workplace. Findings of the study are in line with the existing substantiation in the literature that workplace spirituality functions as a motivational resource for enhanced engagement of employees towards work at their respective organizations (Ugwu et al., 2014; Macinga et al., 2015). The results show that the integration and a blend of ethical leadership and workplace spirituality address the engagement of workers at their workplace in a positive manner hence enhancing the performance of the organization through work engagement dynamically. Moreover, the study responds to the effect of workplace spirituality on employees as a mediator in examining how ethical leadership plays its role in influencing work engagement positively in an organization. In view of previous studies, cultural factors also have a due effect on the efficacy of ethical leadership in an organization (Kirkman et al., 2009).

With reference to the literature review, the current study conceptually develops the relationship between ethical leadership, workplace spirituality and employee work engagement. The paper further emphasizes the concept that ethical leadership enhances employees work engagement in connection with workplace spirituality. The proposition is in line with research carried on ethical leadership suggesting that organizations can strengthen themselves through the traits of ethical leadership and workplace spirituality. The constructs together can foster a soothing and spiritual environment for working employees, prompting their engagement towards work and organizational performance. Organizations having good leadership and providing rationale, conducive and spiritual environment yield more focused output from its employees. Numbers of researches conducted over decades have focused on the better understanding of organizational performance factors at the organizational and individual level. The current study professes on the concept that workplace spirituality develops learning and contributing culture in an organization, hence increases the employee engagement towards work. The culture and environment of workplace spirituality driven through ethical leadership, in turn, have a positive effect not only on the employee's engagement but also their attitude towards work and organization as a whole.

4.2. Conclusion and directions for future research

The study reveals and recommends that organizations are to take lead and responsibility to foster such environments and drive ethical leadership based management practices to develop the trust of employees and flourish a culture based on spirituality. The overall environment would be beneficial not only enhance the work engagement in employees but have had had an effective business environment built on best practices in organizations. Strengthening the constructs of ethical leadership and workplace spirituality would prompt and cultivate the concept of work engagement among employees based on the trust they will have in the leadership and organizational environment. The outcomes of such these implementations would be seen in the attitude and behaviours of employees demonstrating fairness and ethics in work practices and decision-making matters at their workplace. The overall regime of work would be more spiritual and ethical and employees would value their time at the workplace by indicating positive behaviour towards work and the organization. The changing culture would not only bring in a positive change in the working patterns of the employees but all stakeholders and customers to the organization would also see added value in the customer relationship, the business and its related products and services. Insights of spirituality and ethical leadership would contribute towards positive reforms in the overall environment and procedures of the workplace through the same employees by virtue of their engagement at the workplace.

The paper provides the basis for organizational based understanding in a more effective manner with ethics and spirituality making the core of the businesses. The organizations could rely on having a competitive advantage in the form of increased work engagement of their employees and the demonstration of fair practices and behaviour. All organizations and firms having their businesses and management practices based on spirituality and ethics can groom their employees on the same lines and have the capability as a market advantage over the competitors. By virtue of SDT theory such dynamic and spiritual environment fostered through ethical leadership and workplace spirituality can prove to enhance the overall organizational performance as literature reveals that organizations with overcoming external and internal instabilities, effective and efficient work practices and high work output can always transform multiple opportunities to their favour and drive through reduced operational costs (Chmielewski & Paladino, 2007; Drnevich & Kriauciunas, 2011; Tsai et al., 2012, 2013; Wilden et al., 2013; Ling et al., 2016). Management researchers in future should take foresight beyond the prevailing management literature and see spirituality and leadership as the means for effective organizational performance and work yield of employees. Based on the doctrine of the current research study and its conceptual model, further studies should test the model through empirical research.

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