

To Withdraw or Not to Withdraw: The Role of Workplace Spirituality and Intrinsic Work Motivation

Workplace
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Abstract

The withdrawal behaviour of employees has been a serious concern for organizations around the world to date so much so that the area demanded further research on causes of withdrawal behaviour. This is far more severe in the hospitality industry where employee retention has become a major challenge for the management. Although previous researchers have already investigated the withdrawal behaviour of employees, the empirical findings show an inconclusive causality between the antecedents of withdrawal behaviour and the withdrawal behaviour among employees in the hospitality industry. Thus, still questions remain on how those factors influence employee withdrawal behaviour. To address these problems and to view withdrawal behaviour from a novel perspective, the authors drew on the social exchange theory, confirming the theory by conceptualizing the mediating impact of intrinsic work motivation between workplace spirituality and employee withdrawal behaviour. Workplace spirituality has been identified as a prominent influential factor for many work outcomes, including withdrawal behaviour; yet its impact remains under explored. After an extensive review of extant literature, this paper proposes a model which explains the mediating role of intrinsic motivation in the relationship between workplace spirituality and withdrawal behaviour. This conceptualization contributes to an extension of the current understanding of employee withdrawal behaviour and provides managers with insights into strategies they can utilize to minimize withdrawal behaviour in organizations.

Keywords: Withdrawal behaviour; Workplace spirituality; Intrinsic work motivation.

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Introduction

Withdrawal of an employee is a critical concern for organizations around the world. It is often described as a deliberate response to perceived threats to increase psychological and physical distance from the organization (Rurkkhum, 2018; Spendolini, 1985.) This psychological or physical distance includes turnover and absenteeism (Dalton & Todor, 1993; Lehman & Simpson, 1992; Rosse & Hulin, 1985). The most common forms of employee withdrawal are absenteeism, employee turnover, tardiness, and burnout (Timms et al., 2015). These withdrawal behaviours begin with occasional psychological withdrawal behaviour, eventually expands to behavioural withdrawal, and successively increases withdrawal (Lehman & Simpson, 1992). It could result in loss of knowledge, loss of productivity and poor financial performance (Durrah & Chaudhary, 2020; Zamanan et al., 2020). Thus, it is vital to address the employee withdrawal behaviour.

Causes of such withdrawal behaviour may be generic or industry specific. The hospitality industry is one of the major industries in the world which is currently facing this challenge (Milliman et al., 2018). Even though the hospitality industry serves a high contribution to the economy, extant literature indicates that the hospitality industry worldwide is experiencing a challenge of high employee turnover (Amah, 2009; Milliman et al., 2018). Kuria et al. (2012) note that the hospitality industry leads in this regard with a high number of employees 'job-hopping' from time to time. Having been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, withdrawal behaviours in the hospitality industry have risen significantly due to feelings of job insecurity, anxiety, stress and depression among employees resulting from mass employee downsizing (Khawaja et al., 2021). Most of the research conducted shows that the rate at which staff leaves organizations in the sector is unavoidable and not so easy to control by the organizations experiencing it (Chalkiti & Sigala, 2010; Cho et al., 2009; Deery, 2008; Ezeuduji & Mbane, 2017; Moncarz et al., 2009). Hence, these organizations in the hospitality industry have to identify the root cause to make corrective actions.

Recent organizational behaviour literature has identified workplace spirituality as a significant antecedent of numerous work outcomes including commitment, involvement, intention to leave and absenteeism (Charoensukmongkol et al., 2013; Milliman et al., 2003; Rego & Cunha, 2008; Sewwandi & Dhammika, 2020). Nonetheless, applying this concept to understand individual work-related outcomes in the hospitality industry is scarce. Available literature on withdrawal behaviour in the hospitality industry has focused only on the possible impact of physical and psychological factors such as antecedents of withdrawal behaviour. Some of such notable factors are depression, anxiety, job dissatisfaction, harmful effects to physical health, job insecurity (Khawaja et al., 2021) and organizational contextual factors like perceived organizational support and organizational justice (Park & Min, 2020). However, workplace spirituality and resulting intrinsic motivation can provide great insights to understanding this growing withdrawal behaviour among employees in the hospitality sector (Beenher & Blackwell, 2016; Milliman et al., 2018). Research on workplace spirituality naturally focuses on the humanistic nature of individuals at work examining whether they experience their jobs as fulfilling (Milliman et al., 2018).

Therefore, as an initiative to conceptualize employee withdrawal behaviour in the hospitality industry from a novel and under-explored perspective, this concept paper aims to propose a model including workplace spirituality and intrinsic motivation as significant antecedents to explain withdrawal behaviour. Accordingly, we expect to show how workplace spirituality influences the withdrawal behaviour of employees through intrinsic work motivation by means of the proposed model.

Literature Review

Withdrawal Behaviour

The withdrawal behaviour of the employee is defined by Rurkkhum (2018) as physical and psychological disengagement from the job and organization but while maintaining the organizational membership. Oh (1995) has explained withdrawal behaviour as a reaction by an employee dissatisfied with their work situation. Withdrawal behaviours are actions intended to place physical or psychological remoteness between the employee and the organization (Rosse & Hulin, 1985). More clearly, Erdemli (2015) has defined withdrawal behaviours as any employee behaviour of withdrawal from duties and responsibilities because of a distance that grows between the employee and the organization. Works of Hulin (1991), Johns (2001) and Koslowsky (2000) have identified voluntary employee lateness, absenteeism and turnover as “withdrawal behaviours” because they each represent some physical removal from the workplace.

Two general perspectives have been taken to explain the link between withdrawal behaviours (Koslowsky, 2000). One perspective holds a holistic view on withdrawal behaviour whereas the other views each of withdrawal behaviours as unique. Proponents of the holistic view claim that voluntary lateness, absenteeism, and turnover as indicators of an overall withdrawal from work which shows the dissatisfaction and lack of commitment of the employees towards work (e.g., Hulin, 1991; Rosse & Hulin, 1985; Rosse & Hulin, 1984). The second perspective suggests that these withdrawal behaviours are driven by specific antecedents, thus making them unique and not reflective of an overall withdrawal behaviour (e.g., Price & Mueller, 1981; Steers & Mowday, 1981).

There are a number of interconnected aspects that can be stated to influence an employee's withdrawal behaviour. Spendolini (1985) divided those determining factors into three main categories. Amongst them, individual factors include gender, age and seniority. Further, organizational factors include size of the organization, job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Moreover, economic factors include overall economic condition, wages, skill level, employment condition and leadership style. All these individual, organizational and economic factors affect how employees withdraw from their work. Employees' withdrawal behaviour in an organization are signs that employees are dissatisfied with the happenings in the work environment either physically or psychologically (Mgbemena, 2022).

Theoretical Background

This study on withdrawal behaviour draws on the Social Exchange Theory. This theoretical framework is rooted in previous philosophical and psychological foundations that

stem from utilitarianism and behaviourism (Cook & Rice, 2003). According to the behaviourism, this theory indicates social behaviour as a reciprocal exchange (Cook et al., 2013). In which, any behaviour is a function of payoffs of human and non-human environment (Cook et al., 2013). Accordingly, this study posits that withdrawal behaviour is influenced by numerous factors that are commonly found in an organisation, including workplace spirituality. Consistent with the aforementioned, findings of previous studies indicate that workplace spirituality could impact an employee's withdrawal behaviour (Fry, 2003; Gouldner, 1960; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Accordingly, a spiritual workplace offers socio-emotional resources to employees, leading them to feel obligated to reciprocate the duties formed through the employee-employer exchange connection.

Workplace Spirituality

In the past few decades, there has been a growing interest among both scholars and practitioners on the pros and cons of incorporating spiritual values in the workplace (Zhou & Lee, 2022). Previously identified as having a religious connotation, spirituality is now being recognized as a natural phenomenon of a human being that shows a connection with the universe (Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004) which is a part of both the personal and work life of an individual. When applied to work settings, it is to identify that “employees have an inner self which nourishes and gets nourished by meaningful work which is taking place in the context of a community” (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000, p. 137). It is the desire to find an individual's ultimate purpose in life, develop a strong connection with peers and subordinates and be consistent with one's core beliefs and values of their organization (Mitroff & Denton as cited in Djafri & Noordin, 2017). Nevertheless, given the dearth of research on the area, there is no such agreement between researchers on a single definition of the concept (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002; Milliman et al., 2003; Rego & Cunha, 2008).

Workplace spirituality can be experienced through inspiring leadership and mentorship, organizational integrity, trust, openness, kindness, honesty, morals and ethics, a sense of peace and harmony, an aesthetically pleasing work environment, etc. (Kinjerski & Skrypneck, 2006b; Vasconcleos, 2018). Even though some have identified the above as dimensions of workplace spirituality, those forwarded by Ashmos & Duchon are considered the most quoted and empirically tested spirituality dimensions. As per their studies, opportunities for the inner life, a sense of community, meaningfulness of work and alignment with organizational values are the key dimensions of a spiritual workplace that individuals can experience via different organizational value systems (Ashmos & Duchon (2000). When organizations incorporate spiritual values into the workplace, it not only results in positive work outcomes at the individual level but also can be measured through organizational-level economic outputs of enhanced quality, productivity and profitability (Rathee & Rajain, 2020).

Intrinsic Work Motivation

Employee motivation is defined as the force that drives the direction, intensity and persistence of employee behaviour (Pinder, 2008). It may therefore be no surprise that employee motivation is seen as one of the most enduring and compelling topics in work and organizational

psychology (Kanfer et al., 2017). Construct of motivation has been studied from many different perspectives and mainly categorized in to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation is defined as motivation to engage in a task or activity for its own sake (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Furthermore, intrinsic motivation can be defined as an “interest in and enjoyment of the work for its own sake” (Le Grand, 2003, p. 53). For intrinsically motivated behaviour, there is no apparent reward but the behaviour itself (Lindenberg, 2001). According to Deci (1973) several approaches which may account for intrinsically motivated behaviour are considered: (1) drive naming; (2) optimal incongruity and optimal arousal; (3) reduction of uncertainty; and (4) competence and self-determination. Individuals who are intrinsically motivated, work on tasks because they find them enjoyable and interesting, and find that participation is its own reward, reflecting an inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, and to explore and to learn (Deci & Ryan, 2000). With regard to intrinsic motivation, or the motivation to perform an activity for itself in order to experience the pleasure and satisfaction inherent in the activity (Deci et al., 1989), prior research has found a negative relationship between intrinsic motivation and turnover intention across different cultural settings (Kuvaas, 2006; Richer et al., 2002; Vansteenkiste et al., 2007). As per the study of Jensen et al. (2019), employees with a high level of this type of motivation will tend to always come to work when they are not ill (because they enjoy being at work) and not come to work when they are ill (tasks are hardly enjoyable when you are ill). They also have found the support of recent literature for finding a negative association between intrinsic motivation and sickness absence (Andersen et al., 2015). According to the study conducted by Raza et al. (2015), they have identified that intrinsic motivational factors (job security, achievement, responsibility and work itself) are significantly related to employee job satisfaction.

Workplace Spirituality and Withdrawal Behaviour

Literature in relation to employee turnover supports a significant impact of workplace spirituality on employees’ withdrawal behaviour. According to Browns (2003) and Jurkiewicz & Giacalone (2004), spiritual transformation of the workplace is a cure for most ill practices of management which had broken the trust in the psychological contract between the employer and employee. As employee trust is considered a prominent determinant of employee retention, it can be argued that a spiritual workplace can lead to reduced withdrawals. As in the norm of reciprocity of the Social Exchange theory, when a spiritual workplace provides socio-emotional resources to the employees, they feel obliged to repay the obligations created through the employee-employer exchange relationship (Gouldner, 1960; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), hence reducing turnover and enhanced commitment. As Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) suggest there is empirical evidence available that “workplace spirituality programmes not only lead to beneficial personal outcomes such as increased joy, peace, serenity, job satisfaction, and commitment but that they also deliver improved productivity and reduce absenteeism and turnover” (Fry, 2003, p.703).

The negative association between workplace spirituality and withdrawal behaviours of employees is evident across industries. As Beenher and Blackwell (2016) report in their meta-analysis of literature, workplace spirituality has proven to be negatively affecting withdrawal

behaviour including the intention to leave the hospitality, manufacturing, healthcare and sales industries.

Most of the studies conducted covering several workplace spirituality dimensions have also supported this negative influence. According to Ghadi (2017), a work environment with a high sense of community, and interrelationships and which provides meaningful work assignments is believed to be negatively influencing withdrawal behaviours. His claims support the work of Hackman and Oldham (1976) and Trott (1996), which assert that the feeling of community at work and interesting and challenging work is negatively related to absenteeism and turnover. Similarly, Milliman et al., (2003) suggested that a sense of community and alignment with organizational values have a negative impact on employee turnover intention. However, their study did not support the significance of the negative association between meaningful work and turnover intention even though the relationship was negative.

In line with the above arguments, we propose,

Proposition 1: There is a significant impact of workplace spirituality on the withdrawal behaviour of employees.

Workplace Spirituality and Intrinsic Work Motivation

Spirituality at work has been identified as a multi-faceted construct that has a significant influence on an individual's intrinsic motivation (Sharma & Husain, 2012). It carries properties that can transform a job or workplace that leads to an intrinsically motivating one. Hence, numerous studies have concluded a positive link between the two constructs (Fry, 2003; Saeed et al., 2022). Studies on intrinsic motivation largely denote similar values and behaviours which were suggested by Ashmos and Duchon (2000) as dimensions of workplace spirituality as antecedents of intrinsic motivation at the workplace. One's expression of spirituality at work itself underpins the assumption that each individual has his or her own inner motivations which they try to fulfil through the activities they engage in the workplace (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Milliman et al., 2003). Hence, a workplace that actively responds to their employees' sense of purpose and espoused values is considered as having individuals more intrinsically motivated in their work (Afsar et al., 2015; Catlette & Hadden, 1998; Urdan & Maehr, 1995). Moreover, when there is a high congruence among the job, its context and the person's self-concept, work becomes motivating as it enables the expression of spiritual identity (Duchon & Plowman, 2005).

Meaningfulness of work, which is one of the three key psychological states for intrinsic motivation in the Job Characteristic Model (JCM) (Vroom & Deci, 1992), shares similar properties of the meaningful work spirituality dimension proposed by Ashmos and Duchon. The core job characteristics: skill variety, task identity, and task significance which generate the meaningfulness of a job are the facets Ashmos and Duchon also incorporated in their explanation of meaningfulness. Sense of community as a spiritual dimension too intercedes intrinsic motivation. This is far more valid in the context of a contemporary workplace where employees spend most of their time at work and where the workplace is identified as a community rather than a mechanized entity. The feeling of connectedness, belongingness and

appreciation resulting from such work communities tend to awaken the inner motivation of individuals.

Spill over theory provides a suitable platform to conceptualize the link between workplace spirituality and one's intrinsic motivation (Lee et al., 2021; Bell et al., 2012). When an employee perceives his or her work climate as spiritual, the accompanying positive attitudes will positively spill over to his or her work domain, in this context, resulting in intrinsic work motivation. This phenomenon is called Horizontal spill over by Lee et al., 2003 (as cited in Kolodinsky et al., 2008) where "satisfaction with one life domain influences the satisfaction of neighbouring life domains" (p.468).

Given the above arguments on the link between workplace spirituality and intrinsic work motivation, we propose:

Proposition 2: There is a significant impact of workplace spirituality on intrinsic work motivation.

Intrinsic Work Motivation and Withdrawal Behaviour

Intrinsic work motivation influences the withdrawal behaviour of employees. The findings of previous studies demonstrate that a lack of intrinsic motivation could result in turnover intention (Ghadi, 2017). Consequently, it could result in withdrawal behaviour. In particular, one study conducted amongst academics indicated that, when the employee is stressed and frustrated, this impacts motivation as thus, leads to withdrawal behaviour (Ghadi, 2017). In addition, another study conducted amongst teachers found that intrinsic motivation is a significant determinant of psychological withdrawal (Keaveney & Nelson, 1993). This relationship can be explained based on the self-determination theory (Mustafa & Ali, 2019). The self-determination theory indicates the factors that lead to autonomous motivation. In which turnover and psychological satisfaction are considered as an outcomes of an individual's motivation (Galletta et al., 2011). Accordingly, it can be argued that an employee with less intrinsic motivation is highly likely to withdraw from workplace. Consequently, intrinsic work motivation impacts the withdrawal behaviour of an employee. Hence, the following proposition is advanced:

Proposition 3: There is a significant impact of intrinsic work motivation on withdrawal behaviour.

Mediating Influence of Intrinsic Work Motivation

The impact of workplace spirituality on withdrawal behaviour is inconclusive as discussed above. The relationship between workplace spirituality on withdrawal behaviour can be explained based on the Social Exchange theory (Gouldner, 1960; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Empirical findings show both positive causality and negative causality between workplace spirituality and withdrawal behaviour. Existing literature explains this contradiction as a lack of comprehension of the unclear underlying process of influence on turnover intentions (VanDick et al., 2004; Firth et al., 2004; Ghadi, 2017; Schlechter & Engelbrecht, 2006). Few prior findings indicate a positive relationship between workplace spirituality and withdrawal behaviour (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Fry, 2003). In contrast, few other empirical findings reveal that there is a negative causality

between workplace spirituality and withdrawal behaviour (Beenher & Blackwell, 2016; Ghadi, 2017; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Milliman et al., 2003; Trott, 1996). Thus, this indicates that the impact of workplace spirituality on withdrawal behaviour is inconclusive.

Intrinsic work motivation mediates the relationship between workplace spirituality and withdrawal behaviour. Therefore, predictions of workplace spirituality and intrinsic work motivation relating to withdrawal behaviour should be verified to understand the mediating effect of intrinsic work motivation on the above-mentioned relationship. First, workplace spirituality impacts withdrawal behaviour. As explained previously, workplace spirituality is considered a determinant of withdrawal behaviour, as is articulated in the Social Exchange theory (Gouldner, 1960; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Second, workplace spirituality impacts intrinsic work motivation. As explained previously, workplace spirituality is a source of intrinsic work motivation, and this is articulated in the spill over theory (Lee et al., 2021; Bell et al., 2012). Accordingly, workplace spirituality being the positive perception about workplace, results in intrinsic work motivation. Third, as explained above, intrinsic work motivation determines withdrawal behaviour, and this is articulated in the Self-determination theory (Sharma & Husain, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Empirical studies indicate withdrawal behaviour or disengagement as a result of lack of motivation (Gard et al., 2014). Hence, it could be argued that a positive relationship between workplace spirituality and withdrawal behaviour is possible only if workplace spirituality results in intrinsic work motivation. This is demonstrated by the self-determination theory, which indicates that factors of intrinsic motivation such as workplace spirituality could result in intrinsic motivation, consequently, withdrawal behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Similarly, the existing research context (that is the hospitality industry) indicates lower intrinsic work motivation levels and higher withdrawal behaviour, as indicated in the problem. Therefore, it can be proposed that there is a mediating influence of intrinsic motivation on the impact of workplace spirituality on withdrawal behaviour. Accordingly, it can be argued that socio-emotional resources of spiritual workplace should result in intrinsic motivation, to reduce the likelihood of withdrawal behaviour. Hence, the following proposition is advanced:

Proposition 4: Intrinsic work motivation mediates the impact of workplace spirituality on withdrawal behaviour.

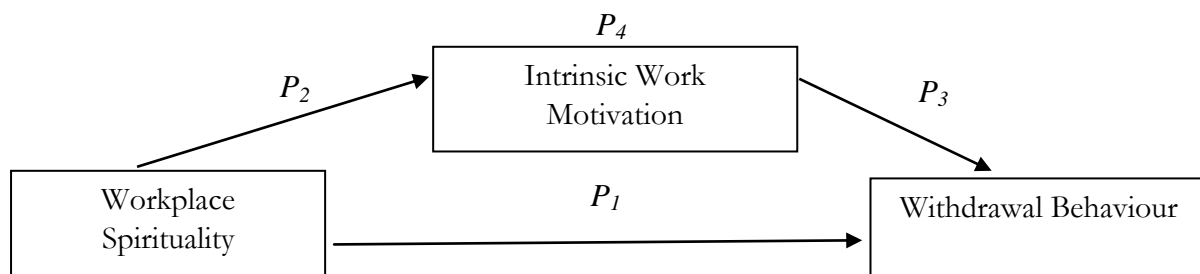


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author constructed

Conclusions and Implications

Studies on employee withdrawal behaviour are considered essential for any organization irrespective of its industry of operation since employee withdrawals severely disrupt the growth and survival of an organization by way of affecting profitability and morale of the present and prospective employees.

In such a context, high prevalence of withdrawal behaviour has created imperative managerial challenges in the hospitality industry, which is especially dependent on human capital. This study observed that there is an inconclusiveness in the existing body of empirical knowledge to analyze this problem. Specifically, there are contradictory empirical findings regarding the causality between the antecedents and withdrawal behaviour. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to contribute to a better understanding of the factors that influence employee withdrawal behaviour in the Sri Lankan hospitality industry. On the basis of a comprehensive literature review, a conceptual framework is proposed that includes workplace spirituality as an antecedent to employee withdrawal behaviour and intrinsic work motivation as a moderator of employee withdrawal behaviour. This proposed conceptualization's empirical insights on the factors influencing employee withdrawal behaviour are regarded as contributing to the scholarly body of knowledge and indicating managerial implications for controlling withdrawal behaviour. Especially the role of spirituality and mediating role of intrinsic motivation could uncover significant empirical insights relevant to the hospitality industry.

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