

Extending Job Demand-Resources model in Public Administration Contexts: Examining the Interplay of Organizational Politics, Public Service Motivation, and Psychological Safety Climate in Work Engagement

Abstract

Previous research has recognized the importance of psychological concepts in public administration. Nonetheless, despite appeals for integration, public administration scholars have frequently overlooked psychological concepts and approaches in their research. To bridge this gap, we employed the Job Demand–Resources Framework—a psychological construct—to propose a moderated mediation model between organizational politics and engagement in public sector organizations. We analyzed cross-sectional data from 487 employees across federal-level public hospitals in Pakistan using SmartPLS 4. The findings reveal that organizational politics in public hospitals negatively impacts work engagement through diminished public service motivation; however, a robust psychological safety climate significantly weakens these negative effects, reducing both the direct negative influence of politics on PSM and its indirect effect on engagement through PSM. Our study contributes theoretically and gives public hospital administrators practical ways to boost PSM and reduce gossip culture through open communication and trust-building. Importantly, while these measures mitigate political toxicity, other strategies are still needed to reduce politics' effects and improve employees' engagement.

Keywords: Job Demands–Resources, Public Administration, organizational politics, work engagement, public service motivation, Psychological Safety Climate, healthcare, Pakistan.

Introduction

The job demands-resources model highlights that job characteristics can be classified into two distinct categories: job demands and job resources. Briefly, job demands may “reduce energy and resources”, and it categorized into two types: hindrance demands (demotivating force), and challenge demands, which present chances for progress (motivating force)(Cooke et al., 2019). On the other hand, job resources “can lessen or balance these demands, lowering strain and limiting negative effects on employee behavior and outcomes”(Bakker, 2015a). To put it briefly, Studies in public administration have shown that personal and job resources, as well as job demands, significantly impact worker engagement among public sector personnel. Accordingly, JD-R model(Bakker, 2015a)suggests that organizational politics in the public sector may serve as a hindrance to job demands (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2020), imposing psychological and emotional strain on employees that destroys their energy and resources (Demerouti et al., 2001), thereby negatively impacting work engagement (Mussagulova, 2021). Work engment defined as "a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Organization politics in public service can be partly attributed to “the undeniable inequality of power between superiors and subordinates in local government units.” (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2020; Yu, 2014). as individuals typically respond to their perceived reality rather than objective reality, research on organizational politics characterizes it as a subjective experience rather than an objective one(Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). Hence, along with the majority of previous research, our current study employed perception as a measure for assessing organizational politics (POP) (Vigoda-Gadot & Meisler, 2010). Perception of organizational politics (POP) indicates the extent

to which individuals believe they work policy is unjust (Abdullah & Al-Abrow, 2025). Perception of politics can manifest in several forms in public hospitals, but the researchers here focused on preferential treatment based on relationships rather than merit. Since the healthcare profession is characterized by irregular shifts, long working hours, complex responsibilities, and on-call duties, which require healthcare workers to invest significant time, energy, and personal lives in their job (S. Deng et al., 2018). Accordingly, these job demands are standard for all healthcare professionals, who generally understand and accept them as part of their roles (Hurwitz & Richardson, 1997). However, their supervisors often determine healthcare workers' duties and scheduling (Kossek et al., 2016). Evidence suggests that supervisors shield their favorite employees from challenging and demanding tasks (De los Santos et al., 2020). Therefore, we hypothesized that POP, in the form of preferential treatment to friends and favored employees, such as saving them from rush hours, night shifts, holiday duties, or emergencies, and instead assigning these duties to others, adversely affects the victim employee's attitude. Frequently, a survey of Filipino nurses in public hospitals identified a significant negative relationship between perceived politics and job satisfaction (De los Santos et al., 2020).

This study is guided by three main objectives. This first objective examines the direct impact of organizational politics, as a hindrance to demand, on work engagement within the JD-Framework in public sector hospitals. Organizational politics and work engagement have been extensively researched in Western public sectors (Cooke et al., 2019; Kidron & Vinarski Peretz, 2018; Lee et al., 2020a), their relationship in non-Western contexts, particularly in public sector hospitals, remains underexplored (García-Sierra et al., 2016; Simpson, 2009). We focused on Pakistani healthcare workers in public hospitals, as they deliver the majority of health services in Pakistan. Despite having a developed healthcare infrastructure, the public healthcare system in Pakistan has significant challenges, including rapid population growth, personnel deficiencies, and restricted access to resources. Consequently, healthcare professionals, who offer the bulk of health services, endure extended working hours, intense workloads, and strained physician-patient interactions, thereby exacerbating the system's capacity to provide high-quality care (Haq et al., 2025). Another important reason to study organizational politics and work engagement is the significant variations in the structures and characteristics of public administration across different countries, as each nation is influenced by its unique political, bureaucratic, cultural, and historical circumstances (Scrimshire et al., 2023). The context highlights the importance for scholars to deeply understand these dynamics across different settings (J. Park & Lee, 2020). The public administration system of Pakistan is highly significant due to its intricate framework, covering the political structure, service delivery mechanisms, and bureaucratic infrastructure (Khawaja & Khalid, 2022).

Governments exhibit less attention to rectifying the prevailing flaws within public service organizations. Individuals lack knowledge of their rights, governmental services, and grievance resolution processes. Where public sector employees frequently encounter organizational politics, which can impact their work environment (Riaz & Akbar, 2013). Office politics takes many forms in Pakistani public sector institutions, including but not limited to favoritism, nepotism, power disputes, and information manipulation (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2019). Decisions are frequently biased toward those with more seniority or close family ties, and favoritism can influence promotions and job assignments. The presence of gender opinions, corruption, and bribery all adds to an already unjust work environment. Employees may act sycophantically or minimize accountability to obtain favors. Where the persistent political instability in Pakistan (Afzal, 2023), has greatly weakened the efficacy of public sector institutions, rendering them less capable of performing their basic functions and serving the requirements of individuals (Abbas & Awan,

2017). Eventually such an environment may induce psychological distress among employees, leading to unstable behaviors and performance issues. It disrupts employees' mental health and diverts their focus from work. In this scenario, employees are physically present at work yet mentally disengaged. Collectively, these problems highlight the crucial dependence of research on the dynamics of organizational politics and work engagement within Pakistan's public administration system, with a primary emphasis on the healthcare sector. Thus, the first research question guiding this study is, how does organizational politics influence work engagement among employees in public sector hospitals in Pakistan?

The second objective of this study is to examine the mediating role of Public Service Motivation (PSM) as a personal resource within the JD-R framework. PSM defined “predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations” (Perry & Wise, 1990). Alternatively, PSM is a "general altruistic motivation to serve the interests of a community, a state, a nation, or humanity" (Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999). Individuals exhibiting heightened PSM have altruistic intentions, desiring to benefit others and society through the provision of public services (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008a). Public service-motivated employees are generally more dedicated to the public good and less driven by external rewards (Tu et al., 2023). They want to do things that are in line with values like altruism, and they want to improve and contribute to societal well-being (Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2010). PSM can make employees more engaged at work and lead to other positive outcomes, since PSM-high employees are more likely to think their work is important and meaningful. However, it is challenging for public employees to sustain their effort and commitment to public service when they do not perceive their efforts as successful (Bashir et al., 2023; van Loon et al., 2018; Wright, 2007). This effect can also be attributed to the fact that high-PSM personnel are likely to hold higher standards for their roles. In some cases, high levels of public service motivation may raise perceptions of pressure and stress rather than reduce them (Giauque et al., 2012). For example, red tape, a source of hindrance demand in public settings (Bozeman, 1993), can function as a job demand (Borst, 2018; Giauque et al., 2013), thereby reducing public service motivation (Scott & Pandey, 2005; Uluturk et al., 2023). Additionally, consistent with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, a recent study in public administration found that personal resources, such as PSM, do not act as a mediator between organizational politics and outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2020). The research findings of Alcoba and Phinaitrup, contradict previous studies, which demonstrate that the impact of stress on public service motivation among Chinese medical professionals is inconsistent—challenge stress increases motivation, whereas hindrance stress diminishes it, indicating that Public Service Motivation mediates the relationship between stress and presentism (J. Deng et al., 2019). These ideas make current researchers rethink how PSM acts as a personal resource that influences the link between organizational politics and work engagement, since the job demand-resources framework is more effective for understanding work engagement (Mussagulova, 2021). No previous research has examined how PSM mediates the relationship between work engagement and organizational politics. Therefore, the second research question that guides our study is, how does public service motivation mediate the relationship between organizational politics and work engagement among public hospital employees in Pakistan? By doing this, we further bridge a gap in the literature by acknowledging the role of public service motivation as a mediator between organizational politics and employee engagement (Kristanti & Eko Yudiantmaja, 2022), thereby enhancing our understanding of the challenges faced by government employees.

The third objective of this study is to examine the moderating (buffering) role of psychological safety climate (PSC) as a job resource within the JD-R framework, both directly (between politics and PSM) and indirectly (between politics and work engagement through PSM). Focusing on this objective enhances the originality of our study, providing unique insights into how psychological safety climate, as a job resource, reduces the negative effects of the perception of politics. Previous research demonstrated that job resources positively and directly influence work outcomes and buffer the demands placed on the work environment. The buffering role refers to the capacity of employment resources to reduce the negative effects of job demands on an individual's well-being. (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018) Job resources can provide employees with essential tools to mitigate work-related stress and restore the energy expended owing to these demands. Employees' morale and productivity improve when they have access to the tools they need to meet their job demands effectively. Research in public administration has provided substantial evidence to support this phenomenon, known as the buffering effect, which suggests that resources play a crucial role in sustaining motivation, particularly in stressful circumstances (Cooke et al., 2019). While the importance of psychological safety climate (PSC) is increasingly accepted in public administration research (Potipiroon & Ford, 2017), its buffering effect in mitigating the impact of perceived organizational politics on public service motivation has yet to be investigated. SC is a place where employees feel free to communicate their concerns and ideas about their jobs without having negative consequences (A. Edmondson, 1999; Potipiroon & Wongpreedee, 2021). A psychologically safe environment fosters substantial communal trust and mutual respect, allowing employees to freely discuss concerns and express their opinions without fear of criticism. In such environments, individuals are more inclined to navigate interpersonal risks, communicate honestly, and maintain motivation, particularly considering unfavorable conditions at work, such as political behavior (Chinelato et al., 2020). In line with this, we argued: In public hospitals, the perception of politics can negatively impact on PSM. However, when employees trust and perceive that they can voice concerns about misconduct without fear of retaliation from superiors or colleagues (A. Edmondson, 1999), this creates a psychologically secure environment that fosters equity and support, thereby reducing the harmful impact of workplace politics. Further, in a psychologically safe environment, individuals prioritize problem prevention over self-protection (A. C. Edmondson & Lei, 2014). It can be posited that individuals who regard their organizational environment as secure, specifically those who perceive a high level of psychological safety within their organization, are likely to exhibit more incredible energy and engagement in exerting effort to fulfill their tasks, despite an environment characterized by organizational politics, which typically induces feelings of anxiety, frustration, and energy depletion (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Hall et al., 2013) investigated the impact of personal resources, including optimism and self-efficacy. They found that nurses exhibited greater work engagement with elevated emotional demands and personal resources during weeks.

JDR framework - hypothesis, the boosting effect states that job resources significantly increase employee engagement, especially when job demands are high (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). For instance, Employees are likely to exhibit heightened engagement in their work on days when they possess sufficient resources to manage demanding job responsibilities. Accordingly, those who receive performance feedback from their supervisors while operating under high pressure may cultivate increased efficiency and effectiveness, improving their sense of competence (Cheong & Kim, 2018). To strengthen the above arguments, previous research indicated that the negative impact of politics on commitment, as well as the positive impact of politics on turnover, was attenuated by a positive psychological climate. Hence, when public service motivated employees

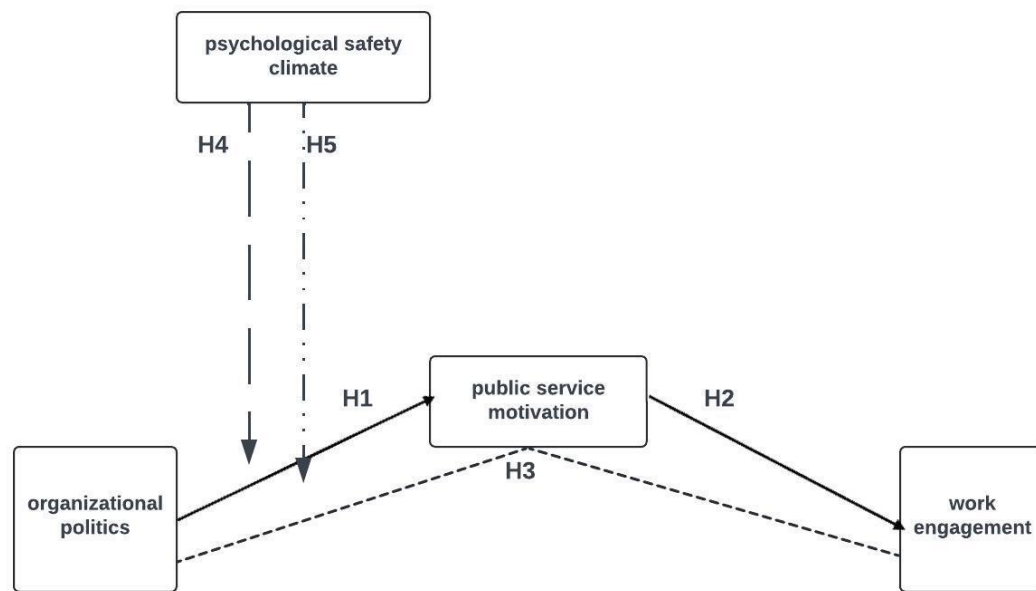
realize that the organizations support their ideas and opinions (regarding their job), there is organizational communication to listen to and act on their concerns. This way, PSC naturally serves as a source of further inspiration for public service-motivated employees. It also reminds them that their actions are crucial to society and that their interests are less vital than the public's. Hence, PSM in the workplace will be strengthened, leading to an overall improvement in efficacy, despite the challenges imposed by organizational dynamics.

Based on this discussion, we further argued that by mitigating the detrimental impacts of politics through enhanced PSM, PSC promotes elevated engagement in work, enabling employees to maintain commitment and productivity despite the challenges imposed by organizational dynamics. Ultimately, PSC as a job resource is a protective element that fosters sustained engagement. Thus, our third research question is divided into two parts: first, to explore how psychological safety climate, as a job resource, can buffer the relationship between organizational politics and PSM. And second, to investigate how PSC buffers the impact of organizational politics on work engagement through PSM in Pakistan's public healthcare system?

In this sense, our research significantly contributes to the domain of public administration in three key aspects. First, we apply the Job Demands-Resources framework to public sector hospitals in politically unstable and non-Western countries such as Pakistan, providing new insights into how perceptions of organizational politics affects work engagement in these challenging environments. Secondly, although public service motivation is acknowledged as a fundamental concept in public administration research, our study is the first to demonstrate how PSM mediates the negative relationship between POP and work engagement, an empirical relationship that has not been adequately explored. Finally, while psychological safety climate has been studied in public sector settings, no research has yet investigated how PSC directly buffers (moderates) the impact of organizational politics on PSM and how it indirectly buffers the relationship between organizational politics and work engagement through PSM. Thus, these results are supported by theoretical concepts and expand our understanding of the complex dynamics in politically unstable environments such as Pakistan.

The research framework, as shown in Figure 1 below, provides a detailed overview of the study.

Research Framwork



Source : created by author

Note.

- Direct hypothesis H1 H2
- Mediating hypothesis H3
- - - - -→ Moderating direct hypothesis H4
-→ Moderated-Mediation hypothesis H5

Figure 1

Next, we discuss job demands and resources and their relevance to public administration, followed by developing hypotheses based on this framework. Then, we outline the methodology and data collection process, present the results, and discuss the theoretical and practical implications. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research and an overall conclusion.

1. Theoretical discussion and hypothesis development

1.1. Relevance of Job Demand-Resource Model in Public Administration

The JD-R model was initially formulated in the fields of general management and organizational psychology to clarify employee well-being and performance. Recently, researchers in public administration and management have increasingly acknowledged its significance for the public sector. This shift signifies increasing approaches to resolve theoretical gaps by incorporating recognized management theories into public administration scenarios (Lavigna, 2015; Mussagulova, 2021). Researchers have specifically addressed concerns for increased scholarly

attention to work engagement in public organizations. Despite this advancement, several factors within the JD-R framework remain inadequately examined in public administration research (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2017). In our study, we use the JD-R model to look at how organizational politics, Public Service Motivation, and Psychological Safety Climate affect work engagement in public healthcare institutions, which has not been studied much, especially in politically unstable and non-Western nations like Pakistan.

The JD-R theory posits that employees' energy, enthusiasm, and concentration levels, which signify engagement, are strongly influenced by the work environment. Specifically, it addresses the disparity between work demands and the resources available to manage them (Bakker, 2015a). Job demands are defined as a job's physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects that require continuous physical and/or psychological effort, including cognitive and emotional exertion. These demands include distinct physiological and psychological costs, as they use energy and have the potential to drain resources (Gross et al., 2019). Job demands can be categorized into two distinct types. The first type, hindrance demands, includes stress and obstacles that make it harder to reach goals and get rewards by acting as barriers or unnecessary steps for employees. These demands function as demotivating forces. In the public sector, perceptions of organizational politics and bureaucratic red tape exemplify hindrance demands. The second type, challenge demands, presents opportunities for growth, motivation, and enhanced performance, thereby serving as motivating forces. Examples of challenge demands include an increased workload, stringent deadlines, and expanded job responsibilities.

On the other hand, job resources refer to the various components of a job, including its physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects that fulfill diverse purposes. These resources have the potential to (1) decrease job demands and mitigate the related physiological and psychological costs, (2) support achievement of work goals, and (3) foster personal growth, learning, and development. By providing these advantages, job resources play a crucial role in enhancing employee well-being, motivation, and performance. Job resources in public service include supervisory support, recognition, positive feedback, and opportunities for professional development.

In addition to the primary impacts of resources and demands on employee well-being, the JD-R theory also posits two interaction effects. The first interaction effect is known as the buffering effect (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, 2018). This perspective posits that employment resources may mitigate the adverse effects of hindrance job demands on well-being. Accordingly, Job resources equip employees with the tools to manage work-related stress and replenish the energy they've depleted due to such demands. Employees' morale and productivity improve when they have access to the tools they need to effectively meet their job demands. Thus, job resources can moderate or buffer the negative effects of job demand.

The second interaction effect is referred to as the boosting effect. Especially in this context, when personnel encounter significant challenging demands, including substantial workloads or cognitive pressures. In such circumstances, job resources (e.g., feedback, assistance) augment work engagement by assisting employees in managing the demands of their responsibilities. Employees receiving performance evaluations during high-pressure situations may have increased competence and engagement in their work (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

1.2.Hypotheses Development

1.2.1. Organizational politics and public service motivation

Extensive research exists addressing the interaction between organizational politics (POP) and public service motivation (PSM); nevertheless, a theoretical examination of this relationship is relatively limited, especially within the domain of public administration (Shrestha & Mishra, 2015). We investigate this link through the framework of job demand (Bakker, 2015a), analyzing how hindrance job demands, demonstrated by perceived organizational politics, which deplete personal resources, are demonstrated by public service motivation in public hospital employees. In a public sector setting, organizational politics can impose significant strain on personnel, requiring substantial mental and physical effort. Since individuals continue to perform their responsibilities in a highly political work environment, their desire to work for others gradually decreases- PSM. Prior research has also proven that PSM, a personal resource, may encounter pressure, constraint, or coercion as they strive to meet hindrance job demands, such as politics (Pandey, 2021; Pandey et al., 2007). Additionally, these public sector-motivated employees may feel frustrated with their workplaces due to inconsistencies between their tasks, the prevailing atmosphere, and their beliefs about their desires (Tu et al., 2023). These persistent frustrations could lead to a decline in their volunteerism or intrinsic motivation, which could lead to a decline in their work. This corresponds with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) concept, which asserts that excessive job demands can exhaust employees' energy and result in burnout (Borst, 2018; Giauque et al., 2013). Similarly, excessive bureaucratic procedures, commonly referred to as red tape, a source of hindrance demand (Bozeman, 1993), can function as a job demand (Borst, 2018), thereby reducing public service motivation (Scott & Pandey, 2005; Uluturk et al., 2023). Consistent with existing literature, we argue that perceived organizational politics, functioning as hindrance demands, lead to a reduction in PSM (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2020). Hindrance demands are stress-inducing obstacles that impede goal achievement and obstruct progress toward rewards, acting as barriers or unnecessary prerequisites for personnel, thereby serving as demotivating forces.

Specifically, in public hospitals, preferential treatment based on personal relationships rather than merit can erode employees' trust and perceptions of fairness. The decline might damage their motivation to serve the public, diminishing public service motivation. As employees feel their contributions are unappreciated and their psychological resources are exhausted, their dedication to public service diminishes. This further indicated that rather than channeling resources toward achieving the public good, public sector employees are forced to navigate the complexities of workplace politics, which can gradually erode their intrinsic values (PSM) (N. Park & Lee, 2022). Overall, these insights are supported by empirical studies indicating that respondents with a pronounced self-sacrifice dimension of public service motivation showed diminished organizational commitment when they reported higher organizational politics. This finding indicates that POP may reduce PSM, resulting in diminished organizational commitment (Shrestha & Mishra, 2015). Concisely, we believe that job demands can be differentiated as challenge and hindrance stressors (Crawford et al., 2010). Challenges (e.g., time urgency) can be appraised as stressful demands that may potentially boost personal growth. In contrast, hindrances (e.g., organizational politics) can be appraised as stressful demands that may inhibit personal growth. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Organizational politics, as a hindrance to job demand, negatively impacts public service motivation by depleting personal resources.

1.2.2. Public service motivation and work engagement

Research suggested that the connection between Public Service Motivation and employee engagement is not straightforward or universal. Instead, it depends on whether employees perceive their organizational environment as supportive of their public service motives or not (Bashir et al., 2023; Borst et al., 2019a). Specifically, individuals with higher norms around performing public services, reflected in high PSM, are likely to be more engaged in their work (Mussagulova, 2021). However, individual variances in PSM levels and the notion of meaningful service to citizens and society show that lower levels of PSM may correspond with lower levels of engagement. Besides political entanglements, defined autonomy and restrictive reward systems affect engagement differently for public sector employees compared to private sector personnel. These variables suggest that public employees may not experience the same levels of engagement and disengagement as their private sector counterparts (Scrimshire et al., 2022). Highly engaged employees are less likely to suffer from burnout (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), while disengaged employees experience imbalance and a lack of connection with their colleagues and tasks (De Simone et al., 2016; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; May et al., 2004). This indicates that work engagement is a consistent process; it is more likely to develop and persist over time than to be a one-time reaction. Individuals are highly engaged when they have the resources to meet workplace demand; alternatively, when they have fewer or lower resources, they do not meet their goals and are less engaged (Kahn, 1990).

In light of this, it is essential to investigate these variations in order to comprehend the impact they have on the level of individual work engagement within the context of public administration (Vinarski Peretz, 2020). The previous study was one of the first attempts to offer theoretical insights into the relationship between PSM and work engagement by (Bakker, 2015b), who conceptualized PSM using the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Several theoretical propositions are derived from his argument that workers with various levels of PSM handle the demands and resources of their jobs differently regularly. This suggests that employees with high PSM as personal resources are highly motivated and engaged in their jobs, whereas low PSM may weaken engagement (Borst et al., 2019b; Ugaddan & Park, 2017). Based on the above discussion, we argued that in public institutions like hospitals in Pakistan, public service motivation frequently varies and is hardly maintained over extended periods, particularly in resource-constrained environments filled with challenges. Consequently, the PSM levels in these contexts are typically lower than those in other sectors. Thus, a decline in PSM is likely to affect work engagement in these settings adversely. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that a workplace with weak norms –PSM– may lead to lower work engagement, and high norms may lead to higher work engagement. Consistent with the above arguments, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Employees with low public service motivation as a personal resource exhibit lower levels of work engagement, whereas those with high PSM demonstrate greater engagement.

Prior research indicates that workload, as a job demand, diminishes personal resources, thereby adversely impacting work engagement among home-health nurses (Bakker et al., 2023; Noesgaard & Hansen, 2018). Thus, combining the preceding arguments (**Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2**), we argued that organizational politics, as a hindrance to job demand, depletes employees' public service motivation, as a personal resource. As PSM decreases, it weakens employees' work engagement in public hospital settings. Therefore, PSM independently mediates the relationship between organizational politics and work engagement, explaining how the depletion of this

personal resource leads explicitly to reduced engagement, distinct from the direct effects of organizational politics

Recent scholars in public administration have also utilized the JDR Framework, identifying perceived organizational politics as a job demand and PSM as a personal resource (mediator) that impacts work outcomes. While their objective was to investigate whether PSM can mitigate the potential adverse effects of perceived politics as a job demand (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2020). Accordingly, we argue that public service motivation is a valuable personal resource (Borst et al., 2019a); however, when public service-motivated employees perceive their supervisors' decisions based on personal preferences rather than merit (perceived politics), their desire to work for others (PSM) will decrease. Ultimately, this desire gradually weakens their work engagement (low), as suggested by (Bakker, 2015b).

Thus, we proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: Public Service Motivation, as a personal resource, negatively mediates the relationship between organizational politics, as a hindrance to job demand, and work engagement, such that OP negatively impacts PSM, and in turn, lower PSM leads to reduced work engagement.

Following the above explanation that organizational politics functions as a hindrance to job demand and Public Service Motivation (PSM) serves as a personal resource influencing work engagement, below we further explore Psychological Safety Climate, as a job resource, first, how directly it buffers (moderates) the relationship between organizational politics and PSM, and then how indirectly influences work engagement through PSM. Empirical studies prove the buffering hypothesis, demonstrating that job resources are crucial for employee motivation, particularly in high-stress conditions (Bakker et al., 2007). Job resources provide employees with tools to manage workplace stresses and recover energy consumed by job demands. Thus, when employees maintain more significant resources to manage their job demands, the latter's adverse impact on job outcomes might be mitigated.

According to our theoretical framework, we argue that psychological safety climate (PSC) is a crucial job resource that can help mitigate the negative impact of hindrance demands on personal resources, particularly Public Service Motivation (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). PSC is a higher-level resource that promotes organizational well-being and can facilitate the success of individuals, groups, and organizations (Loh et al., 2021). PSC is an environment where employees may freely express their problems and thoughts regarding their work without facing negative consequences (Edmondson 1999). In such an environment, employees feel comfortable discussing problems without being criticized by supervisors and coworkers (Bernards et al., 2023). Additionally, in psychologically safe conditions, there is a strong sense of mutual regard and trust among members (Potipiroon & Wongpreedee, 2021). Thus, high PSC helps employees to understand that the organizations prioritize their psychological well-being and provides effective communication mechanisms to address the root of their problems (Siami et al., 2023).

Particularly, we propose that a higher psychological safety climate (as a job resource) enables employees to express concerns and address issues, especially in workplace demands such as preferential treatment arising from organizational politics in public hospitals. In such an environment, employees feel confident that their perspectives will be valued (A. Edmondson, 1999). For example, when hospital employees voice concerns to their supervisors, they believe that their superiors will respond with genuine consideration. This supportive environment mitigates the tension, irritation, and energy depletion associated with office politics.

Therefore, despite the challenges posed by a perceived politics, employees can maintain their determination and engagement in the public hospital setting. Hence, A supportive psychological safety climate might mitigate such effects by enabling employees to manage their anxiety and express themselves effectively (Kark & Carmeli, 2009). This is also because by providing employees with the essential resources to manage work-related stressors, job resources assist them in recovering the energy drained by these demands. Therefore, when employees are given sufficient resources to handle the demands of their jobs, the adverse effect on their performance is significantly mitigated. This mitigated/buffering concept has been supported by empirical research in the field of public administration, which has demonstrated that resources have a significant motivational function and are incredibly efficient when they are most needed (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2020; Cooke et al., 2019). The role of PSC as a mediator was investigated by a public administration scholar (Potipiroon & Wongpreedee, 2021) who hypothesized that psychological safety can mitigate the perceived costs associated with whistleblowing. According to (Kiewitz et al., 2002), a positive psychological safety climate may reduce the adverse impact of perceived organizational politics on job outcomes, such as organizational commitment and turnover intentions.

Based on these previous discussions, scholars suggest that public service employees who perceive their organizational environment as psychologically safe are more inclined to maintain their motivation. When employees choose to express their concerns, they likely hope their supervisors will treat them with the utmost consideration. By providing a supportive atmosphere and safeguarding individual rights, such a work environment acts as an inspiration for motivation (maintaining their PSM), highlighting to employees the significance of their contributions to society and the importance of the public's interests over their own, even in politically charged circumstances where they might experience anxiety and frustration. In other words, psychological safety climate moderates the negative association between the perception of organizational politics and public service motivation. However, low PSC will further strengthen the negative relationship of perceived politics and PSM.

Consistent with the previous arguments and importantly aligned with the JD-R framework, we raise the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Psychological Safety Climate as a job resource buffers the relationship between organizational politics (as a hindrance to job demand) and public service motivation as a personal resource, such that the negative relationship between organizational politics and PSM will be weaker when psychological safety climate is high.

The combination of **Hypothesis 3** and **Hypothesis 4** indicates the potential existence of a moderated mediation effect. This indicates that job resources, such as PSC, indirectly mitigate the adverse effect of perceived organizational politics (hindrance demand) and work engagement by mediating public service motivation (personal resources). According to the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, perceptions of organizational politics (POP) are considered a hindrance to job demand, which can deplete personal resources such as public service motivation (PSM). As a job demand, POP can create stress and negatively impact PSM, weakening work engagement. However, as a job resource, Psychological Safety Climate (PSC) can buffer these adverse effects by providing a supportive environment where employees feel safe and valued. A high PSC reduces the stress caused by POP, thereby protecting PSM from depletion. As a result, PSM is maintained, which helps sustain or enhance work engagement, despite organizational politics. Conversely, in organizations with lower psychological safety, the detrimental effects of organizational politics on

PSM are more pronounced, leading to reduced work engagement. Thus, we raise the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Psychological Safety Climate (as a job resource) buffers the indirect relationship between perceived organizational politics (as a hindrance to job demand) and work engagement through public service motivation (as a personal resource), such that the negative impact of POP on work engagement via reduced PSM is weaker when PSC is high.

2. Methodology

2.1.Data and samples

The data collection occurred from December 15, 2023, to January 15, 2024. This period was chosen to maintain data consistency and reduce the possible impact of internal or external influences, such as policy alterations or changes in hospital management practices. No substantial policy alterations or environmental modifications transpired during this brief and regulated interval, reinforcing the gathered data's stability and dependability. The healthcare system in Pakistan consists of both public and private sectors, with healthcare responsibilities primarily allocated to provincial governments. However, the federal government significantly influences policymaking, particularly about national standards and regulations. Thus, we included employees from three key public health institutions located near the federal territory of Pakistan: Pakistan institute of medical sciences (PIMS) Hospital, National Institute of Health (NIH) Hospital, Federal Government Services Hospital (FGSH). Due to their strategic importance as capital-based institutions, widely considered benchmarks for healthcare delivery in Pakistan, further, data collection from these hospitals was facilitated by their accessibility and logistical convenience.

Initially, we requested five Pharmaceutical Sales Representatives (PSRs) to facilitate data collection due to their robust industry ties, relevant educational qualifications, and contact with healthcare experts. These features enabled them to access and engage potential respondents effectively. To improve the response rate and promote broader interaction, each PSR received 60 survey copies for distribution throughout their professional networks, resulting in a total of 300 questionnaires shared among three organizations. This convenience sampling method was employed owing to time limitations and the necessity for enhanced participant cooperation. Convenience sampling may lead to selection biases, as it fails to ensure a representative sample of the larger population. To address this, we carefully chose volunteers from various healthcare positions within the three institutions (doctors, nurses, and administrative personnel) to ensure comprehensive representation. We have examined these potential biases and the control methods implemented to mitigate their effects, including selecting participants from diverse departments and healthcare professions to guarantee a range of opinions. Nonetheless, the number of legitimate responses obtained fell short of the level necessary for thorough data analysis. Therefore, we regarded these responses as components of a pilot study. Initial reliability analysis, encompassing Cronbach's alpha, demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency levels, indicating that the instrument's reliability meets an acceptable standard for pilot testing.

To overcome the restrictions during the initial data collection phase, the survey was later conducted online by email, with additional distribution via social media platforms like Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp for those individuals lacking consistent email access. To strengthen participation and guarantee broader outreach, we persisted in engaging the Pharmaceutical Sales Representatives (PSRs), this time providing an incentive of PKR 100 for each thoroughly

completed and returned questionnaire. Each of the five participants collectively received PKR 5,000 as recognition for their assistance in the data collection procedure. This technique was effective, obtaining 503 useable responses from 665 shared surveys, which corresponds to a response rate of around 75.6%. To guarantee the legitimacy and integrity of the analysis, stringent data quality control techniques were instituted from the beginning. A preliminary screening was performed to evaluate completeness and accuracy, followed by additional data cleaning processes to enhance the dataset for analysis. Subsequent data cleaning processes were implemented, including eliminating eight duplicate entries, 5 extreme outliers from Mahalanobis distance, and 3 instances demonstrating inconsistent response patterns (e.g., straight-lining or conflicting replies). After this quality control procedure, 16 supplementary responses were eliminated. In total, 487 valid responses were preserved and considered appropriate for thorough statistical analysis, fulfilling the inclusion criteria for the primary study.

The comprehensive data screening and cleaning procedures enhanced the reliability of the results. Healthcare education in Pakistan, especially for nurses and doctors, is exclusively delivered in English and conforms to an English-based curriculum, resulting in a high level of proficiency in the English language among these professions. Furthermore, the administrative personnel included in this study were chosen for their proficiency in comprehending English. Consequently, we considered it unnecessary to translate the survey instrument into Urdu. Utilizing the English version of the questionnaire guaranteed uniformity, clarity, and consistency in interpreting survey items among all respondent categories, including doctors, nurses, and administrative staff.

The confidentiality of all responses was rigorously protected with guarantees that only aggregated data would be utilized for analysis and distribution. Personal replies were kept anonymous and inaccessible to those outside the research team. Participants were assured that their data would remain confidential and that their responses would not affect their career or job security. Since this was a volunteer study, participants might withdraw at any time without justification or repercussions. Additionally, we communicated to participants that there were no correct or incorrect responses, reducing potential social desirability or acquiescence bias.

Furthermore, for data analysis, we used Smart-PLS 4 software to apply Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), confirming the reliability of the instruments through comprehensive validation. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), especially path modeling, is extensively employed in management research for predicting causal linkages. According to (Leguina, 2015), Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) can address models encompassing constructs, indicators, and structural relationships. PLS-SEM is also appropriate for theory construction and assessment, facilitating the analysis of the links. PLS-SEM is especially effective for managing sample sizes ranging from small to large without depending on solid assumptions about data distribution. Further, the sample size should be at least ten times the number of arrows directed toward a construct in PLS-SEM (Leguina, 2015). This methodology is considered highly suitable for the present study. We used SmartPLS instead of AMOS or SPSS because it is more appropriate for intricate models that include numerous variables, mediators, and moderators, particularly in exploratory research with a small to medium sample size (Hair et al., 2019). SmartPLS is favored for its capacity to manage non-normative data and its emphasis on predictive accuracy rather than model fit (Henseler et al., 2015).

2.2.Measurement

Our research measured each key variable using scales validated in previous public administration research. All survey items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The response options included anchors such as strongly disagree, moderately disagree, slightly disagree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly agree, moderately agree, and strongly agree. Our research focused on organizational politics, work engagement, public service motivation, and psychological safety climate. Multiple observable measures were incorporated to assess our research variables. These observable items originate from previous research.

2.2.1. Perceptions of organizational politics.

We used a shortened scale with three items for perceptions of organizational politics in our study, based on different cultural and public organizations in a non-Western country, which was adopted and validated by (J. Park & Lee, 2020). Originally developed by (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991) Sample items included: "There has always been an influential group in this organization that no one overcrosses." The Cronbach's alpha value was 0.78. See **Table 1** in the appendix for a comprehensive set of survey questionnaires.

2.2.2. Work Engagement

To measure work engagement, we used the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006). This scale includes items that assess the three engagement dimensions, defined by (WB, 2002) as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption." An example statement was, "I feel bursting with energy at work." The Cronbach's alpha value was 0.91.

2.2.3. Public Service Motivation

The variable that functions as a mediator is a translated version of five items (Perry, 1996), which have been widely used in a variety of cultural contexts and were used to measure public service motivation (Lee et al., 2020b). Four dimensions of individual PSM were measured using this 5-item scale: social justice (one item), self-sacrifice (two items), commitment to public interests (one item), and compassion (one item). An example item was "Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements." The Cronbach's alpha value was 0.82.

2.2.4. Psychological safety climate

In this study, the PSC served as a moderator variable. In line with our theory that psychological safety is a matter of individual perception, we defined it as the degree to which an individual felt it was safe to express themselves at work. To fit the research environment, five questions were modified from earlier studies, such as (Potipiroon & Wongpreedee, 2021). An example item was, "I can express my true feelings about my job in my organization." The Cronbach alpha value was 0.83.

3. Data Analysis and Results

3.1. Demographics statistics

A total of 487 participants had been included in this research. The sample focused on healthcare professionals and administrative personnel from various departments, with a gender distribution of 57.0% males ($n = 277$) and 43.0% females ($n = 210$). The age distribution showed that the majority of participants were between 30 and 39 years, with 21.6% ($n=105$) in the 25-29 age group, 24.8% ($n=121$) in the 30-34 age group, and 24.4% ($n=119$) in the 35-39 age group. Smaller percentages were seen in the older age categories, with 14.8% ($n=72$) aged 40-44 years, 11.1% ($n=54$) aged 45-49 years, and 3.3% ($n=16$) aged 50+. Regarding education, 50.5% ($n=246$) of participants held a bachelor's degree (e.g., BSN, MBBS), 19.7% ($n=96$) had education lower than a bachelor's degree, 7.0% ($n=34$) held a master's degree (e.g., MPH, MSN), 6.0% ($n=29$) held doctoral degrees, and 16.9% ($n=82$) had other relevant degrees such as healthcare administration or business management.

In terms of occupation, 32.6% ($n=159$) were doctors, 27.9% ($n=136$) were nurses, 8.4% ($n=41$) were paramedics, 11.7% ($n=57$) were medical technicians, and 19.3% ($n=94$) were administrative staff. Although we provided a descriptive account of participants' gender, age, and work experience, we did not account for these variables in the primary analysis. We concentrated on analyzing the correlations between Public Service Motivation and Work Engagement. We recognize that demographic characteristics, like age, gender, and experience, may affect these constructs. Consequently, we regard the absence of control for these variables as a study limitation and advocate for future research investigating their potential moderating or confounding effects. **Table 2** displays the demographic features of the study participants.

Table 2: Summary of Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Data (N=487)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender of Respondent		
Male	277	57.0%
Female	210	43.0%
Total	487	100%
Age in Years		
25–29	105	21.6%
30–34	121	24.8%
35–39	119	24.4%
40–44	72	14.8%
45–49	54	11.1%
50+	16	3.3%
Total	487	100%
Education		
Lower than Bachelor'	96	19.7%
Bachelor's Degree	246	50.5%
Master's Degree	34	7.0%
Doctoral Degree	29	6.0%
Other relevant degree	82	16.9%

Demographic Data (N=487)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Total	487	100%
Current Occupation		
Doctors	159	32.6%
Nurses	136	27.9%
Paramedics	41	8.4%
Medical Technicians	57	11.7%
Administrative Staff	94	19.3%
Total	487	100%

Notes: Lower than Bachelor's: This group includes individuals with relevant diplomas and certifications, such as Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), Diploma in Medical Lab Technician, and other similar qualifications. Bachelor's Degree: This includes undergraduate degrees like Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS), bachelor 's-level or bachelor 's-level medical qualifications. Master's Degree: This includes a Master of Public Health (MPH), a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), and other advanced degrees in the healthcare field. Doctoral Degree: This includes a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), a Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians (FRCP), and other doctoral qualifications, particularly in medical or healthcare-related fields. Other Relevant Degree: Includes degrees related to non-clinical healthcare roles, such as Healthcare Administration, Finance, Human Resources (HR), etc. These qualifications are relevant for individuals in managerial and support positions within healthcare organizations.

3.2.Measurement Model Assessment

4.2.1 Reliability and convergent validity

Below, Figure 2 and Table 3 illustrate the results of the assessment of the measurement model to determine how reliable and valid the constructs were.

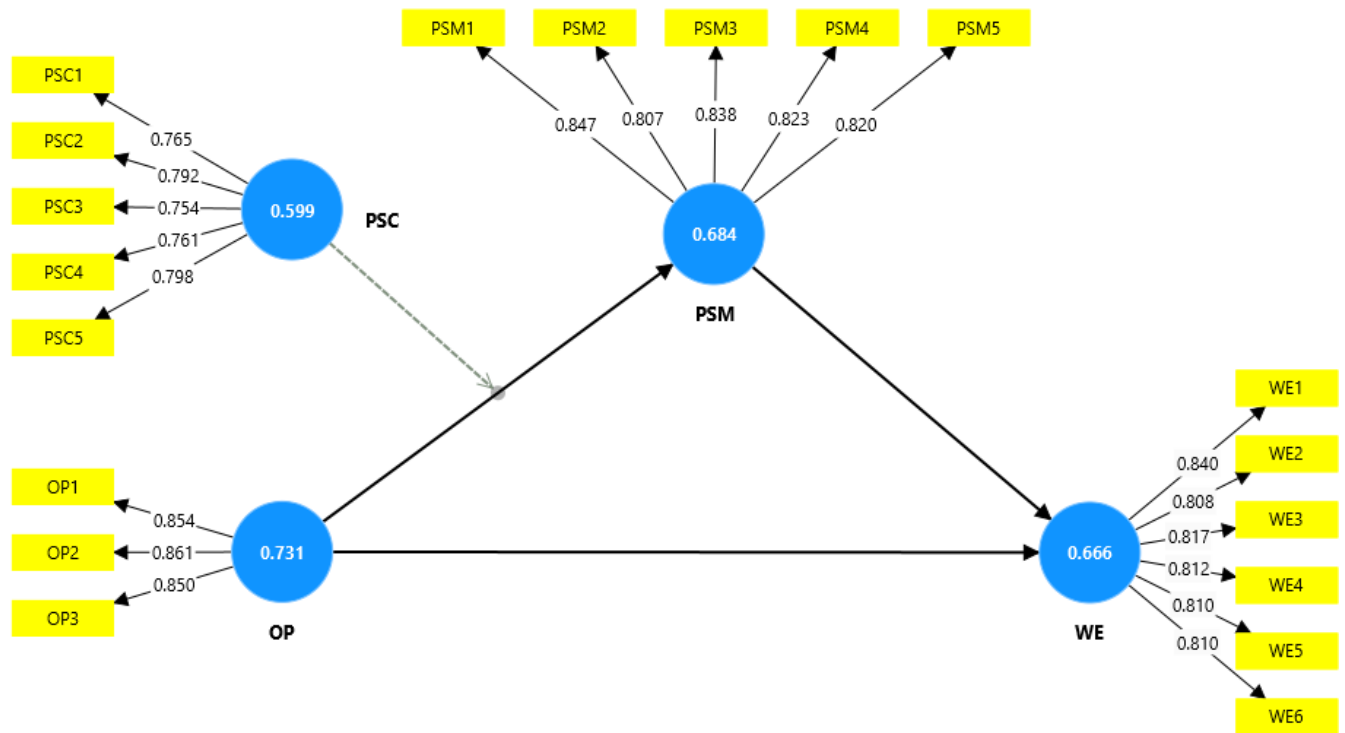


Figure 2. Graphical output PLS-SEM

Table 3: Reliability and convergent validity

Items	Outer loadings	α	rho_a	(rho_c)	AVE	VIF
OP1	0.854	0.817	0.818	0.891	0.731	1.869
OP2	0.861					1.811
OP3	0.850					1.756
PSC1	0.765	0.834	0.845	0.882	0.599	1.616
PSC2	0.792					1.670
PSC3	0.754					1.712
PSC4	0.761					1.747
PSC5	0.798					1.722

PSM1	0.847	0.885	0.886	0.915	0.684	2.290
PSM2	0.807					1.904
PSM3	0.838					2.372
PSM4	0.823					2.094
PSM5	0.820					2.204
WE1	0.840	0.901	0.922	0.923	0.666	2.054
WE2	0.808					2.123
WE3	0.817					2.329
WE4	0.812					2.173
WE5	0.810					2.111
WE6	0.810					2.153

Note: OP: Organizational Politics, WE: Work Engagement, PSM: Public Service Motivation, SC: Psychological Safety Climate, α : Cronbach's Alpha, Rho_a: Composite Reliability, Rho_c: Construct Reliability, AVE: Average Variance Extracted.

Convergent, discriminant, and construct composite reliability were assessed to determine measurement model fit (Lim et al., 2022). All constructs in the current study had composite reliability ratings ranging from 0.817 to 0.901, suggesting strong reliability. Convergent validity was tested using factor loadings and AVE (Sarstedt et al., 2017). Additionally, all constructs have Cronbach's Alpha values over 0.70, indicating internal consistency (F. Hair Jr et al., 2014). According to (Hair et al., 2011), factor loadings and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be more than 0.60 and 0.50, respectively. In our research, all constructs had item loading ranges between 0.54 and 0.861 and AVE values between 0.580 and 0.694, exceeding the thresholds. The constructs' reliability was further confirmed by the Rho_C values, which ranged from 0.882 to 0.923, above the recommended cutoff value of 0.70.

4.2.2 Discriminant validity assessment

Composite reliability is essential for assessing construct reliability. The composite reliability criterion exceeds 0.70 (Liu & Wang, 2016). As (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) recommended, the square root of the AVE was compared to construct correlations to test discriminant validity. However, several experts have criticized this method, claiming it may not be the most accurate measure of discriminant validity (Benitez et al., 2020). As an additional method for evaluating discriminant validity, (Benitez et al., 2020) presented the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. Accordingly, for discriminant validity, the HTMT ratio should be below 0.85. The HTMT ratios for all constructs in our current investigation ranged from 0.057 (OP and PSC) to 0.725 (PSM and OP), significantly below the 0.85 threshold (see Table 4). These results demonstrate discriminant validity because the HTMT ratio does not exceed the required cut-off. The (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) criterion was used to establish discriminant validity in correlation analysis. Table 4 shows that the AVE values for each construct (OP = 0.855, PSC = 0.774, PSM = 0.827, and WE = 0.816) exceed the correlations between constructs, showing discriminant validity. Furthermore, Table 4 shows that the construct correlations were sufficiently low to distinguish each construct. It is important to note

that values below the diagonal represent correlations as per the (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) criterion, while values above the diagonal are the HTMT ratios.

Table 4: Fornell Larcker and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

	Organizational Politics	Psychological Safety Climate	Public Service Motivation	Work Engagement
Organizational Politics	0.855	0.057	0.725	0.145
Psychological Safety Climate	-0.002	0.774	0.159	0.063
Public Service Motivation	-0.618	0.139	0.827	0.052
Work Engagement	-0.130	-0.043	-0.036	0.816

4.2.3 Model Fitness and Collinearity Statistics

Before testing the model, the exact model fit, normed fit index, and normalized root mean square residual were employed to assess model fit. (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015) developed the SRMR as a PLS-SEM goodness-of-fit measure to reduce model ambiguity. The difference between the observed and model-implied correlation matrices is satisfactory for SRMR values below 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Another incremental fit indicator, NFI, compares the proposed model's chi-square value to an established model (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). Fit is generally considered suitable for NFI values above 0.90. The statistical differences between the data covariance matrix and the composite factor model's prediction have been investigated (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). The exact model fit is parameter three. This difference is assessed using d_LS and d_G. A model that fits well has a non-significant difference ($p > 0.05$) between the model-implied and empirical correlation matrix. The model fits well when the difference is small enough to be a sampling error. (Henseler et al., 2016) discovered that a suitable model possesses a 95% bootstrapped quantile (HI 95%) of dULS and dG values lower than their metrics. In this study, the estimated and saturated models match the criteria nearly identically. The estimated and saturated models' SRMR values were 0.049, significantly below the threshold of 0.08 (Table 5). NFI was 0.90, meeting the criterion. The bootstrapped HI, 95% of dULS and dG, also showed a significant data-model concurrence.

Table 5: Model Fit Indices

Indices	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.049	0.049
d_ULS	0.448	0.456
d_G	0.156	0.157
Chi-square	447.934	452.768
NFI	0.902	0.900

Note: SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, d-ULS = Distance-based Unweighted Least Squares, d_G = Geodesic Distance, χ^2 = Chi-square, NFI = Normed Fit Index

Furthermore, we check the inner model's VIF for construct collinearity before and after measuring the model fitness and the structural model. All construct VIF values were below the recommended threshold of 3.3, indicating the absence of multicollinearity (Sarstedt et al., 2022), as further evidenced in Table 6 below. This assures that collinearity does not significantly affect construct relationships, supporting model validity. As noted in Table 2, each item's VIF values were below 3, demonstrating the absence of item-level multicollinearity. Furthermore, we tested Harman's single-factor test for common method bias (CMB). The single component explained 34% of the variance, significantly below the 50% threshold. This study reports no CMB issues.

Table 6: Collinearity Statistics (VIF) Inner Model

Relationship	VIF
Organizational Politics → Work Engagement	1.618
Organizational Politics → Public Service Motivation	1.043
Psychological Safety Climate → Public Service Motivation	1.000
Public Service Motivation → Work Engagement	1.618
Psychological Safety Climate × Organizational Politics → Public Service Motivation	1.043

3.3. Structural Model Assessment

We used R^2 , f^2 , and Q^2 values to examine predictive relevance before testing hypotheses in the structural model (see Table 7 below). The R^2 values measure the model's explanatory strength by reflecting the extent to which exogenous factors explain endogenous variable variance (Rigdon, 2012). R^2 values of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 also indicate weak, moderate, and excellent explanatory power, respectively (Hair et al., 2011). The R^2 score for Public Service Motivation was 0.570, showing good explanatory power, while Work Engagement was 0.039, indicating weak power. The model reasonably explains PSM, but elements outside its reach modify us. Using effect sizes (f^2), (Sarstedt et al., 2022) assessed the strength of correlations between predictor and responder variables. According to (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015) f^2 values below 0.02 suggest modest impacts, 0.02 to 0.15 indicate medium effects, and 0.15+ imply substantial effects. We found f^2 values ranging from 0.006 to 0.162, indicating minor to substantial effects. The strongest effect size ($f^2 = 0.570$) was found between organizational politics (OP) and PSM, supporting its significant impact on PSM. (Hair et al., 2019) investigated predictive relevance using Q^2 values, which measure the model's ability to predict new observations. A model with positive Q^2 values outperforms an initial model (Henseler et al., 2009). A Q^2 score of 0.426 indicates strong predictive relevance for PSM, whereas 0.016 indicates poor predictive relevance for Work engagement. These findings imply the model predicts PSM well, but not work engagement. SmartPLS version 4.0.9 evaluated the statistical significance and relevance of the structural model after determining its predictive relevance (Sarstedt et al., 2022).

PLS-SEM was used for reflective measurement models per (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). As (Nitzl et al., 2016) the whole structural model, including mediation and moderation effects, was studied in one framework. Table 7 lists all results, and **Figure 3** shows the structural model with standardized path coefficients and significance levels.

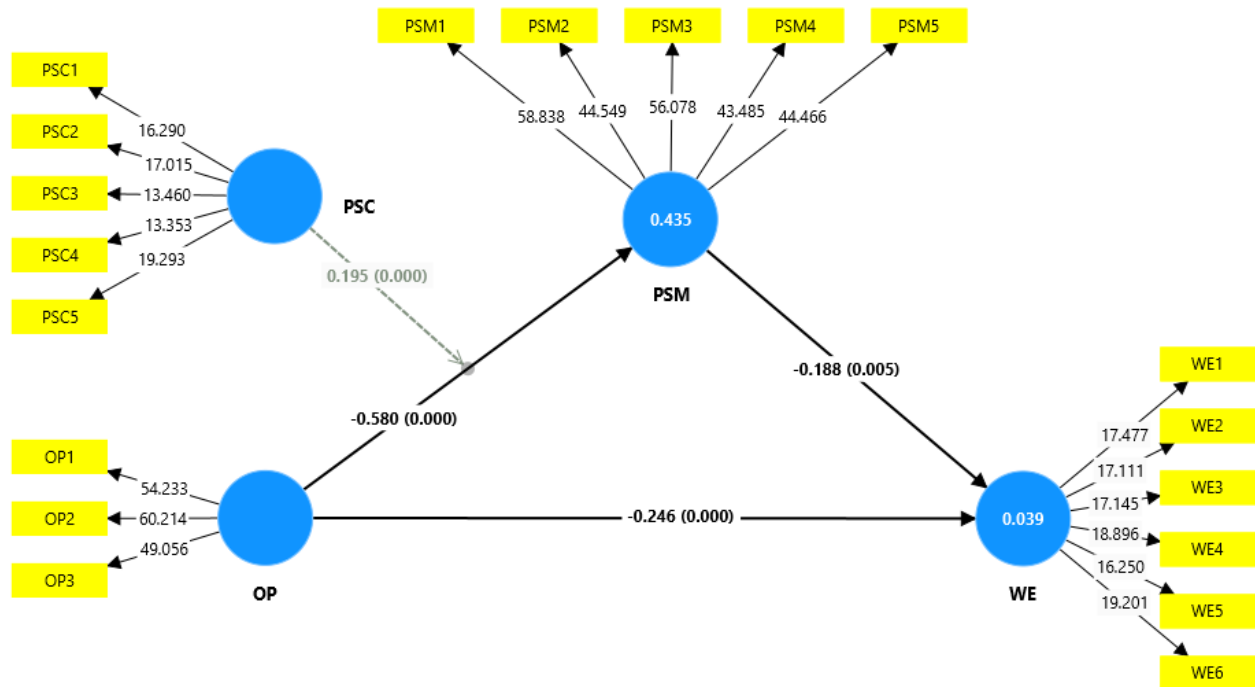


Figure 3. Structural Model graphic output with T-Values, Path coefficients, and P-values

Table 7. Path analysis and Predictive relevance

Relationship		Beta	(STDEV)	T statistics	P values	f-square
<i>Direct Effect</i>						
H1	OP → PSM	-0.580	0.029	20.050	0.000	0.570
H2	PSM → WE	-0.188	0.067	2.783	0.005	0.023
<i>Mediation Effect</i>						
H3	OP → PSM → WE	0.109	0.040	2.735	0.006	

<i>Moderation Effect</i>						
H4	PSC × OP → PSM	0.195	0.030	6.511	0.000	0.060
H5	PSC × OP → PSM → WE	-0.037	0.015	2.376	0.018	
<i>Predictive Relevance</i>						
		Q²		R²		
PSM		0.435		0.016		
WE		0.039		0.426		

Note: OP = Organizational Politics, WE = Work Engagement, PSM = Public Service Motivation, SC = Psychological Safety Climate.

The findings revealed that OP has a significant negative ($\beta = -0.580$, $p < 0.001$) impact on PSM, thus, supporting hypothesis (H1). Lower PSM was found to be negatively associated with Work engagement. ($\beta = -0.188$, $p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis (H2). Although we did not hypothesize the direct association between OP and work engagement, the results revealed a significant negative association ($\beta = -0.246$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, the values in Table 6 support our idea (H3) that organizational politics harm work engagement by affecting public service motivation, showing that PSM is mediating in the negative link between OP and work engagement, meaning that when OP lowers PSM, work engagement also decreases. The statistical findings reveal a substantial negative indirect effect ($\beta = -0.109$, $p < 0.06$), indicating that OP negatively impacts PSM, influencing WE. The negative β value for the indirect link (OP → PSM → WE) matches our theory that more OP is likely to lower PSM, leading to less work engagement (Bakker, 2015a). Thus, this chain of consequences supports our hypothesis H3.

At the next level, the results reveal that Psychological Safety Climate significantly moderates the relationship between Organizational Politics and Public Service Motivation. Specifically, the interaction term (PSC × OP → PSM) is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.195$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that PSC weakens the negative impact of OP on PSM. As the level of PSC increases, the detrimental effects of OP on PSM are mitigated. Further, the moderation graph (see Fig. 4) shows the interaction effect between OP and PSC on PSM. The lines represent the different levels of PSC:

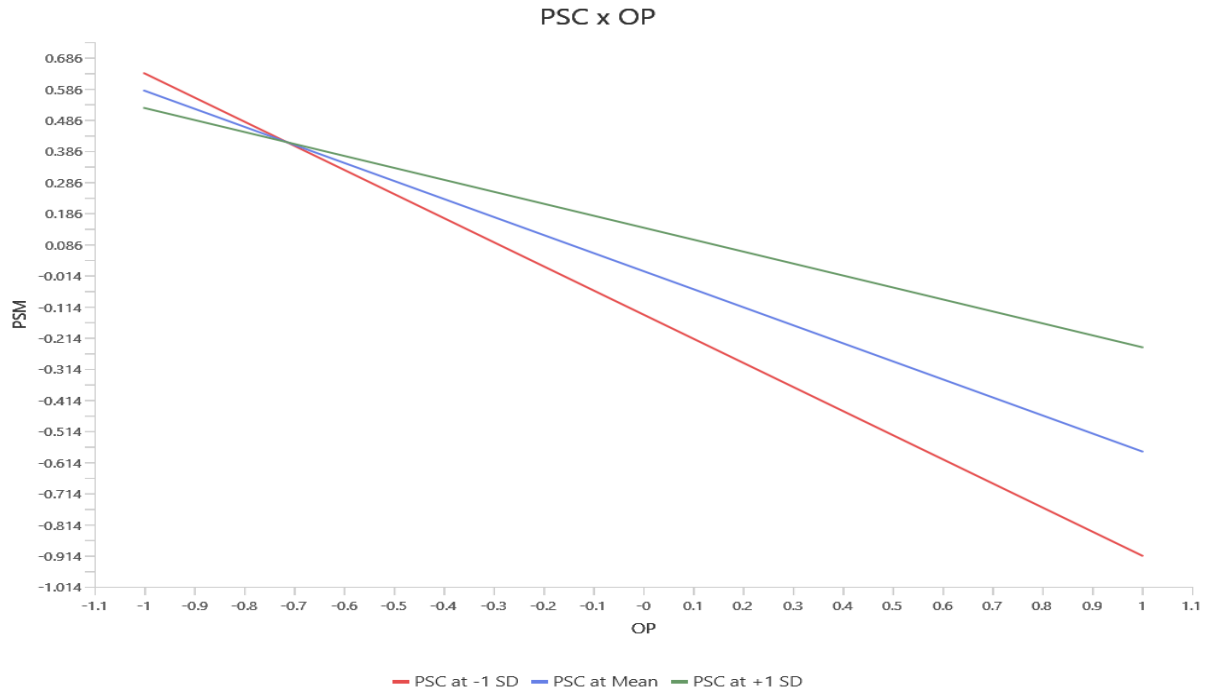


Figure 4. Moderation graph

Red Line: PSC at -1 standard deviation (low PSC); Blue line: SCC at the mean (average PSC)
 Green line: PSC at +1 standard deviation (high PSC). Further indicated that at low levels of PSC (red line), there is a stronger negative relationship between OP and PSM. As the OP increases, PSM decreases significantly. At average levels of PSC (blue line), the negative effect of OP on PSM is still present but less severe compared to low PSC. At high levels of PSC (green line), the negative effect of OP on PSM is weaker. Although PSM declines as OP increases, it is less pronounced than in the conditions. This suggests a more decisive psychological safety climate moderates between OP and PSM. Specifically, higher levels of PSC buffer the negative impact of OP on PSM, meaning that when employees work in an environment where they feel psychologically safe, they are less likely to experience a decrease in their motivation due to the stressors caused by OP, thereby supporting hypothesis (H4).

Ultimately, our research extends to the indirect pathway through which PSC affects Work Engagement. Specifically, the indirect pathway involves PSC moderating the relationship between OP and PSM, and PSM influencing work engagement. While PSC significantly moderates the OP → PSM relationship, its effect on the subsequent pathway from PSM to WE is comparatively weaker ($\beta = -0.037$, $p = 0.018$). This implies that while PSC does mitigate the adverse effects of OP on PSM, this mitigation is less pronounced when it comes to impacting Work Engagement through PSM. To put it differently, PSC is still essential in shielding employees from the negative impacts of OP on their motivation (PSM), but its ability to improve work engagement through PSM is less apparent. Though it also implies that other elements outside psychological safety may also play a role in enhancing work engagement in public sector organizations, this research emphasizes the significance of psychological safety in mitigating the detrimental impacts of organizational politics on motivation. These findings support the study's moderating hypothesis (H5) and demonstrate that PSC plays a crucial role in reducing the negative effects of OP on PSM.

and, indirectly, work engagement. Even though PSC has less of a buffering effect on the PSM → WE link, it is crucial to create an atmosphere where employees can remain highly motivated and engaged despite organizational constraints. This emphasizes how crucial it is for organizations to create a psychologically secure workplace to keep employees engaged, particularly in settings where organizational politics are common.

4. Discussion

This study, rooted in the job demands-resources model, is the first investigation into the impact of perception of organizational politics on work engagement within public sector healthcare institutions in non-Western nations like Pakistan. It specifically emphasizes the mediating role of public service motivation between perception of organizational politics on work engagement and the buffering (moderating) effect of a psychological safety climate in two contexts: the direct relationship between perceptions of organizational politics and public service motivation and the indirect pathway from perceptions of organizational politics to work engagement through public service motivation. While the mediation effect of PSM in this relationship is statistically significant, its strength is weak but acceptable, as indicated by the small effect size. Additionally, the moderating effect of PSC was found to be statistically significant. The findings show that PSC directly buffers the negative impact of POP on PSM, indicating that a higher PSC reduces the negative effects of organizational politics on PSM. Furthermore, PSC indirectly influences work engagement by buffering the POP → PSM → work engagement relationship. Although the indirect buffering (moderation) effect is weaker than the direct effect, it still highlights the importance of PSC in maintaining work engagement in environments with high perceived politics. These results contribute valuable insights to the theoretical understanding of work engagement in public administration and the practical strategies for improving employee engagement in public sector healthcare institutions. The actual findings and their theoretical and practical implications are discussed further below.

First, consistent with Hypothesis 1, our study revealed that organizational politics, particularly preferential treatment in task allocation, such as exempting certain employees from challenging schedules or assignments, gradually weakens employees' desire to work for others. In environments like hospitals, where resource constraints and high-stress demands are prevalent, the persistence of workplace politics steadily erodes PSM. Favoring select employees undermines the morale of those not receiving preferential treatment, ultimately diminishing their intrinsic desire to serve the public. These findings, on one hand, support the Job Demands-Resources model, which posits that hindrance demands, such as politics, play a demotivating role by depleting personal resources, like Public Service Motivation. For example, in public sector environments, red tape hinders job demand and reduces PSM, which is a key personal resource (Borst, 2018; Cooke et al., 2019; Scott & Pandey, 2005). On the other hand, our findings differ from previous research that found no direct relationship between perceptions of organizational politics (POP) and various outcomes, including PSM. These earlier findings suggest that POP by itself may not be inherently destructive and may not directly impact work attitudes or outcomes (Mussagulova, 2021). The result was surprising, given that POP is commonly perceived as a

negative construct that typically undermines employee motivation and well-being(J. Park & Lee, 2020).

Second, consistent with Hypothesis 2, our findings reveal that low Public Service Motivation (PSM) as a personal resource is linked to lower levels of work engagement. This indicates that when employees in public hospitals experience a decline in their intrinsic desire to serve the public, they are less likely to remain engaged in their work. In the public sector, especially in challenging environments such as hospitals, maintaining high levels of PSM can be particularly difficult. The demands of the job, coupled with limited resources and often bureaucratic constraints, can lead to feelings of frustration and burnout. This phenomenon makes it harder for employees to sustain their motivation over time (Quratulain & Khan, 2015). According to the JD-R framework, PSM as a personal resource is a key driver of work engagement in public sector organizations (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Mussagulova, 2021). However, low personal resources may weaken work engagement (Bakker, 2015b; Borst et al., 2019a).

To strengthen our findings, we discuss recent research and arguments in this context, which provide further insight into how PSM can fluctuate between high and low levels, potentially weakening work engagement in the public sector. According to (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008b) Social factors, including institutional frameworks and cultural elements, may influence PSM. Additionally, in public organizations, PSM is shaped by external influences, such as public perceptions of government services, and varies among institutions and sectors. Public organizations differ in their missions, management frameworks, and job roles(Moynihan & Pandey, 2008), even suggesting that not all organizations possess the same ability to meet employees' public service motives. This demonstrates that PSM can grow, deal with, or modify according to the prevailing conditions (Moynihan & Pandey, 2008). This phenomenon shows that PSMs can grow or modify according to prevailing conditions. Public service motivation might have a poor relationship with job satisfaction in instances where public sector organizations are poorly managed, corrupt, influenced by special interests, or neglect to serve the public interest (Kim et al., 2013). Consequently, it can be inferred that personnel with increased PSM exhibit heightened motivation and engagement in their roles, whereas diminished PSM may undermine engagement(Bakker, 2015b).

Third, our findings indicate that PSM mediates the negative relationship between OP and work engagement, such that a decrease in PSM due to OP leads to reduced work engagement. This study aligns with the overarching JD-R paradigm, which asserts that when personal resources, such as PSM, are diminished by job demands (e.g., POP), employees' work engagement is adversely impacted (Bakker et al., 2007). Meanwhile, our finding contrasts with prior public administration research, which suggests that PSM may not always act as a mediator in politically charged environments (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2020). Further, suggested that POP by itself may not be inherently destructive and may not directly impact work attitudes and outcomes, including PSM. The discrepancy in findings may be attributed to cultural disparities that may influence the explanation and recognition of PSM, along with its occurrence, causes, and effects (Kim et al., 2013). The divergence (contextual factors, internal and external influences) in findings may be attributed to the unique context of public sector healthcare, where employees (PSM) play a more pronounced role in shaping their responses to organizational politics. Our findings thus also align with recent research in Chinese public hospitals, which showed that hindrance stress affects healthcare workers' presentism through PSM and other factors(J. Deng et al., 2019). Their study further underscores the importance of PSM as a mediating mechanism in public healthcare

settings, where organizational stressors like POP and hindrance stress influence employee outcomes through their impact on motivation.

Finally, consistent with Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5, our findings indicate that PSC significantly moderates the link between POP and PSM and indirectly influences the POP → PSM → work engagement pathway. PSC was identified as a mitigating factor that lowers the adverse influence of POP on PSM, indicating that an effective PSC environment diminishes the harmful consequences of organizational politics. When employees recognize a secure and encouraging work environment, they are less inclined to suffer the adverse effects of politics. These results align with previous research findings, which indicate that job resources, such as a psychologically safe climate, are consistently beneficial (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Because Job resources equip employees with the necessary tools to manage work-related stress and replenish the energy they've depleted due to Employees' morale and productivity improve when they have access to the tools they need to meet the demands of their jobs effectively; thus, job resources can moderate or buffer the negative effect of job demand (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). To the best of our knowledge, no previous studies have specifically examined PSC's role as a buffer between OP and PSM and work engagement within the framework of public administration.

By fostering a psychologically safe environment, as job resources, organizations can protect employees' PSM (personal resource) from the erosive effects of politics, thereby indirectly supporting higher levels of work engagement. These findings highlight that personnel driven by public service demonstrate strong dedication to their employers and are more inclined to prioritize the public interest when they receive support from their colleagues. In this situation, PSC will function as a momentum for public employee motivation and provide a constant reminder that their actions hold significant importance for society, prioritizing the public's interests over their own. Thus, his commitment to working for others may sustain his engagement and performance, despite the perceived organizational politics in his environment. Nevertheless, this does not imply that politics will completely remove itself from these places. On the other hand, the weaker moderation effect on the PSM → Work Engagement pathway suggests that more strategies may be needed to turn PSM into sustained engagement entirely; other mitigating strategies must be continuously implemented.

4.1. Theoretical Implications

This paper offers significant theoretical contributions to the existing body of knowledge on three primary domains: **First**, the significant contribution of our research is the examination of the influence of organizational politics on work engagement via Public Service Motivation. In contrast with previous research that politics may have no direct effect on PSM (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2020), and a traditional perspectives is that PSM consistently increased engagement (Scrimshire et al., 2023), our results indicate that PSM, as personal resources experiences negative effects by Politics (hindrance demand), often leads to diminished work engagement. Thus, our result theoretically challenges the previous research, and we indicate that organizational politics, especially in resource-constrained settings such as public hospitals, may diminish the incentive value of PSM. **Secondly**, despite the widespread use of the term "buffering" in the field of public administration (Quratulain & Khan, 2015), our research is the first to use psychological safety climates (job resources) as a buffer for the connection between organizational politics, PSM, and engagement in the workplace. Thus, within the Job Demands-Resources model, PSC provides a novel perspective in public administration literature. Our research further examines how a supportive

PSC can help mitigate the detrimental consequences of politics and promote engagement, even in diminished PSM. Thus, this study is the first to acknowledge the role of PSC in the public sector (Potipiroon & Wongpreedee, 2021) and its significance as a job resource for handling organizational politics and improving employee work engagement. **Third**, the job demands-resources framework has been integral to the extensive general management literature. Recently, public administration and management experts have started to broaden their focus to the public sector, responding to the increasing need for research on public service motivation and work engagement in this domain (Lavigna, 2015; Vinarski Peretz, 2020). Nevertheless, the existing body of research in this domain is limited by a dearth of publications concentrating solely on the public sector (Mussagulova, 2021). In this sense, our research also fills this gap by expanding the job demands-resources framework into the context of the public sector by investigating our current variables (Bakker et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2024).

4.2. Practical Implications

Our article points out that workplace politics hurt how well people work and how engaged they feel, especially for those with higher Public Service Motivation (PSM) compared to those with lower PSM, showing that their psychological resources are limited (Park and Lee 2020). Therefore, it's essential to reduce workplace politics in government organizations. In this regard, our article provides valuable information for policymakers, especially healthcare administrators. Public hospitals face unique challenges like political issues, limited resources, and conflicts among different groups, so hospital administrators and HR professionals must change their management strategies to fit the public sector. Unlike private organizations, public institutions need a more careful approach to balance the organization's goals with the well-being of employees. Policymakers and public administrators should create policies that encourage engagement, even with the difficulties of organizational politics. This can be done by managing workloads to lessen stress and frustration from bureaucracy, improving job security to lower anxiety and boost motivation, and promoting open communication between management and staff to quickly and address problems. They should also implement HR systems that reward employees based on their performance and contributions. Additionally, professionals should work towards fair workplaces by using proactive personality traits to spot and fix potential inequalities, ensuring fairness and inclusion for everyone. Training for stress management is essential to help employees deal with the stress from organizational politics, keeping them motivated and engaged.

Second, our findings suggest that OP, as a personal resource, negatively influences PSM, reducing work engagement. Hence, employing individuals with a strong sense of public service motivation is crucial for promoting helpful behavior in government organizations (Karolidis & Vouzas, 2019). First, recruit the right employees with a strong PSM and provide training programs to reinforce PSM behavior within the organization (Uluturk et al., 2023). For this purpose, public managers must acknowledge that public sector employment should allow individuals to fulfill their public service goals and inner demands (Houston, 2006). Administrators should prioritize activities that increase employees' sense of public service, such as recognizing their accomplishments, explaining how their jobs affect society, and encouraging purpose-driven work. Enhancing PSM in this manner could potentially lessen the negative impact of political dynamics on employee participation. Administrators should also focus on strengthening PSM through targeted socialization practices, such as onboarding, training programs emphasizing public service values, and initiatives encouraging direct engagement with service beneficiaries. Additionally, public

hospital administrators investigate unique job conditions, including resources and demands that influence PSM, to inform the establishment of effective human resource policies and internal programs. Given the favorable relationship between employee engagement and perceived resources (Crawford et al., 2010), administrators might encourage increased work engagement by offering additional resources to healthcare personnel, which can boost motivation and overall commitment to public service. Thus, by creating an environment that nurtures PSM, administrator can enhance employee motivation and engagement— even in environments with strong organizational politics.

Our findings indicate that having substantial job resources is more important for employee satisfaction than just lowering job demands; therefore, hospital administrators and HR should create better policies that focus on improving assets instead of only cutting down on job demands. Finding a favorable balance between job resources and job demands is essential to foster a positive work environment (Uluturk et al., 2023). Leaders should aim to build a safe workplace (job resources) where employees can express their concerns without worrying about negative consequences, which can help lessen the negative effects of workplace politics and keep employees engaged in their work.

In collectivist societies like Pakistan, where power distance and paternalistic communication are prevalent, the potential for political behaviour within organizations is amplified. To counter this, public sector organizations should promote regular meetings where employees can openly express their opinions and provide feedback. Managers should actively seek employee feedback to address their concerns and foster a transparent work environment. These efforts will help mitigate the adverse effects of psychological issues and foster higher work engagement. However, we also suggest more potent strategies beyond improving PSM and PSC. For example, public hospital administrators further integrate transformational and political leadership strategies. These strategies are vital for reducing the detrimental effects of internal politics and fostering a more motivated and engaged workforce within public sector institutions.

4.3.Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, there are several limitations. Only three federal hospitals in Pakistan were included in the study's sample, which might not accurately reflect the country's more extensive public healthcare system. Future research could incorporate a bigger and more varied sample from hospitals in the public and private sectors in other geographical areas to improve generalizability. The cross-sectional design of this study constrains the capacity to draw causal inferences. To understand the causal links between variables, longitudinal research is recommended. The prominence of politics in the public sector has increased. To reduce the adverse effects of organizational politics on work engagement, we recommend that future research investigate the influence of transformational and political leadership strategies. For this purpose, Experimental research could examine how these leadership styles mitigate the impact of workplace politics and improve employee engagement, especially in public sector environments. Longitudinal studies could further evaluate their enduring effects on motivation and engagement. By following these variables over time, academics may better understand organizational politics' long-term consequences and how they may change in different circumstances and political climates. The survey was conducted in December 2023, under considerable political instability in Pakistan, which could have potentially affected the results. PSM is influenced by numerous internal and external factors (Quratulain & Khan, 2015), with external political dynamics,

especially within government-related organizations, significantly affecting PSM. Consequently, the results of this research may not entirely represent the present political scene. We recommend that subsequent studies investigate these relationships in diverse public sector organizations, especially in environments with stable governance, to enhance the external validity of the findings (Kim et al., 2013). The data, predominantly gathered via self-reported questionnaires, may be subject to response bias, especially with socially desired responses. Future investigations may integrate objective measurements, observational data, or multi-source evidence to lessen this bias. While the JD-R model is frequently used in organizational research, its application to public sector hospitals, particularly in a developing country like Pakistan, has limits. Future studies could explore how this model can be further modified to better represent the intricate nature of healthcare contexts.

Importantly, more research is needed to explore the role of PSM about other organizational and individual factors, particularly in diverse public sector contexts. These findings will help deepen our understanding of how PSM interacts with variables such as leadership styles, organizational culture, and employee well-being, ultimately contributing to more effective public administration practice. PSC is typically a broad management concept, but recent research has shown its applicability in public sector settings. For example (Potipiroon & Wongpreedee, 2021) studied how PSC and PSM act as mediators, suggesting that feeling psychologically safe might reduce the perceived risks of whistleblowing in public organizations. This increased interest in PSC underscores its significance in the public sector, particularly where personnel face intense organizational demands. Public administration researchers have suggested that more studies are needed on the job demands-resources (JD-R) model. (Mussagulova, 2021) to acquire a more profound knowledge of how work demands and resources affect public sector employees (Bakker, 2015b). In parallel, public service Motivation alone is inadequate to boost work engagement; it requires activation and reinforcement by a supportive work environment that fulfills employees' fundamental needs and intrinsic desire to serve the public (Bashir et al., 2023). Further investigation is required to comprehensively comprehend PSC as a job resource in public administration, especially regarding its role in mitigating the impact of organizational challenges and promoting employee well-being. Future research can also better understand job resources, PSM, and engagement by investigating PSC as a factor that supports employees' basic needs, improving public administration employee performance and well-being.

5 Conclusion

This study, based on the Job Demands-Resources framework, provides new evidence showing that how people perceive organizational politics (POP) can negatively impact their work engagement in public healthcare settings, especially in non-Western and politically unstable countries like Pakistan. Public Service Motivation (PSM) serves as a significant mediator in this negative relationship, and Psychological Safety Climate (PSC) functions as a crucial moderator, buffering both the direct influence of POP on PSM and its indirect effect on work engagement.

The findings reveal that PSM serves as a negative mediator in the connection, meaning that when there are strong organizational politics, it decreases PSM, which then results in lower work engagement. Secondly, a strong PSC helps protect against the negative effects of politics on PSM and also weakens the negative impact of politics on work engagement through PSM.

The study offers significant theoretical advancements by expanding the JD-R model to cover politically intricate healthcare settings. The findings indicate that hospital administrators need to emphasize the enhancement of public service motivation and foster the development of psychologically secure work conditions, where employees can raise job-related concerns without fear of negative consequences.

It is important to acknowledge that our findings do not imply that organizational politics can be eliminated from workplace environments. Rather, future research should explore how transformational leadership and other leadership approaches can be effectively implemented within bureaucratic healthcare systems to manage political dynamics. Further studies are needed to develop sustainable strategies that help maintain employee engagement in settings where political behavior is an inherent part of organizational life.

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Appendix

Table 1: Survey Measures

Perceptions of Organizational Politics

There has always been an influential group in this organization that no one over crosses

Favoritism rather than merit determines who gets ahead around here

People in this organization tend to build themselves up by tearing others down

Work Engagement

I feel bursting with energy at work

I am enthusiastic about my job

When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work

I feel happy when I am working intensely

I feel proud of the work that I do

I feel immersed in my work activities

Public Service Motivation

Meaningful Public Service is very important to me

I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another

Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements

I am prepared to make sacrifices for the good of society

I am not afraid to go to bat for the rights of others even if it means I will be ridiculed

Psychology safety climate

In my organization, I can express my true feelings regarding my job.

In my organization, I can freely express my thoughts

Nobody in my organization will pick on me even if I have different opinions

In my organization, expressing your true feelings is welcomed

I am worried that expressing true thoughts in my workplace would do harm to myself.