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Policies Without Reach? Formal HR Commitment and Workforce Participation in Values-Oriented Practices across Pune Manufacturing Companies

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Abstract

Formal human resource policies are increasingly integrating initiatives informed by workplace values, meaning, and spirituality; nevertheless, institutional commitment does not inevitably result in effective implementation and extensive employee participation. This empirical study investigates the association among HR policy endorsement, reported organizational adoption, and workforce participation in values-oriented HR practices within manufacturing industries in Pune, India. Primary data were gathered from 520 HR professionals by means of a structured questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive statistics, paired-sample comparisons, nonparametric association tests, and ordinal logistic regression. The results indicated significantly greater endorsement of formal adoption policies (M = 4.03) than of reported implementation (M = 3.57), with a mean difference of 0.46 (95% CI [0.38, 0.55], $p < .001$). In addition, 63.5% of respondents reported employee participation of 50% or less, while only 36.5% reported participation above 50%. The eight-predictor ordinal regression model exhibited limited explanatory power, χ^2 (8) = 7.89, p = .445, McFadden pseudo-R^2 = .006, which suggests that the measured indicators of organizational support and implementation did not reliably account for variations in reported participation. These findings underscore the empirical distinction among formal HR commitment, perceived implementation, and workforce participation. The study advances the HRM implementation literature by stressing the value of participation-sensitive evaluation and employee-level verification in assessing the effectiveness of values-oriented HR initiatives.

Keywords: HR Policy–Practice Gap; Employee Participation; Workplace Spirituality; Manufacturing; Implementation; Organizational Decoupling.

1 Introduction

The human resource management (HRM) literature has long distinguished managerial intentions from the practices employee's encounter. Formal policy architecture is visible to executives and auditors, but organizational value is created only when designed practices are communicated, enacted and experienced. This distinction is particularly salient for value-oriented initiatives intended to strengthen meaning, mindfulness, connectedness and ethical conduct at work. Such initiatives may be highly legible as policy commitments while remaining unevenly accessible across occupational groups and production schedules (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Khilji & Wang, 2006).

Workplace spirituality research established a vocabulary for meaningful work, community, and recognition of employees' inner lives (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Subsequent empirical investigations connected these dimensions with work attitudes and commitment (Milliman et al., 2003; Rego & Pina e Cunha, 2008), while work-unit research suggested potential performance relevance (Duchon & Plowman, 2005). These contributions are important, but they do not establish that the existence of spirituality-related provisions within HR policies guarantees their practical reach. An employee may value purposeful work and still have neither schedule flexibility nor an accessible opportunity to participate in a sponsored activity.

Manufacturing presents a useful context for separating espoused policies from workforce uptake. Shift arrangements, hierarchical decision-making, operational deadlines, and unequal access to shared facilities can plausibly constrain participation even when management expresses strong support. The Pune region contains multiple manufacturing segments, permitting an exploratory assessment of how HR professionals describe both their organization's formal commitment and the breadth of employee involvement. The analysis deliberately avoids estimating the effect of these initiatives on employee performance or repeating the parent doctoral project's industry-difference and implementation-barrier tests. Instead, it asks whether policy endorsement, self-reported implementation, and employee participation tell the same organizational story.

The contribution is twofold. Substantively, it assesses the difference between policy signalling and workforce reach using primary survey data collected from HR professionals. Methodologically, it treats reported participation as an ordinal outcome, not as evidence of improved productivity or well-being. Null associations, when estimated transparently, may be informative: they challenge the assumption that stronger policy language necessarily translates into wider participation.

2 Literature Review and Analytical Framework

This literature review scrutinizes academic viewpoints concerning workplace values, HR practices informed by spirituality, and employee participation. It lays out the theoretical groundwork for examining how organizational policy commitments relate to actual workforce engagement.

2.1 Workplace values as a non-religious organizational construct

Ashmos and Duchon (2000) conceptualized spirituality at work through the recognition of inner life, meaningful work and community. Their formulation shifts attention away from religious observance toward employees' experience of purpose and connection. Milliman et al. (2003) examined the relationship of workplace-spirituality dimensions with employee attitudes, and Rego and Cunha (2008) linked spirituality dimensions with several forms of organizational commitment. The available literature therefore supports taking values and meaning seriously while also warning

against reducing the construct to the frequency of ceremonial events. Some interventions labelled "spiritual" may be mindfulness or ethical dialogue, whereas others may explicitly reference cultural or religious practices. A credible HR framework must acknowledge these distinctions rather than presuming all activities are equally inclusive or equally desired.

Field evidence on mindfulness provides one possible behavioral mechanism: Hülsheger et al. (2013) examined emotional regulation, emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction rather than merely recording formal program availability. Kahn's (1990) original engagement research similarly stressed the psychological conditions under which employees invest themselves in work. Neither strand warrants treating managerial endorsement of initiatives as a direct measure of employees' subjective experience. Participation is a narrower and more observable dimension, although in the present dataset it too is reported by HR professionals rather than verified against administrative attendance records.

2.2 Intended, implemented and experienced HRM

Khilji and Wang (2006) reported important differences between intended and implemented HRM, drawing on evidence from multiple organizational constituencies. Piening et al. (2014) extended implementation-gap research by examining how organizations translate intended practices into employee experiences. In a multilevel empirical investigation, Den Hartog et al. (2013) found that communication helped shape the relationship between manager-rated HR practices and employee perceptions. Liao et al. (2009) likewise demonstrated that management and employees do not necessarily see the same high-performance work systems. These studies establish that an HR manager's account of an organization's policies and a worker's receipt of benefits should not be conflated.

Bowen and Ostroff (2004) proposed that effective HR systems generate strong, coherent signals through distinctiveness, consistency and consensus. Nishii et al. (2008) went further by showing that employees' interpretations of why HR practices exist can matter for subsequent attitudes and behavior. Applied to spirituality-related initiatives, the distinction suggests that highly visible written policies may not create a shared understanding of whether participation is voluntary, practical during production shifts, or genuinely valued. Communication, dedicated time, feedback review and actual implementation therefore provide theoretically relevant, although not necessarily sufficient, signals to consider alongside stated policy commitment.

2.3 Institutional decoupling and the participation boundary

Institutional theory cautions that formal organizational arrangements can signal legitimacy without fully changing everyday operations. Meyer and Rowan (1977) described the separation between legitimized formal structure and routine activity; Bromley and Powell (2012) subsequently distinguished gaps between policy and practice from gaps between activities and desired ends. In this framework, formal commitment, enacted activity and employee reach represent successive empirical layers. A high policy score accompanied by lower implementation and limited reported participation is consistent with a possible decoupling problem. However, the present design cannot demonstrate deliberate symbolic compliance: observed contrasts may also reflect resource constraints, worker choice, survey interpretation or the use of non-equivalent items.

This study therefore uses an exploratory, non-confirmatory analytical framework: formal endorsement - reported practice execution - employee reach. This conceptual sequence represents analytically distinct dimensions rather than statistically established

causal relationships. The empirical tests estimate (a) the within-respondent difference between endorsement and adoption, (b) the distribution of reported participation, and (c) whether organizational support and implementation indicators distinguish higher participation categories after adjustment for selected survey characteristics.

3 Research Design and Methods

This section describes research design, the sampling strategy, the measurement instruments, and the statistical methods employed to investigate formal HR commitment and employee participation. Institutional adoption and workforce engagement within Pune's manufacturing sector are evaluated through descriptive and inferential analyses.

3.1 Research Design

Quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive, and analytical research design was used to investigate differences among formal HR policy commitment, reported organizational implementation, and employee involvement in value-s-oriented workplace initiatives. Primary data were obtained from 520 human resource professionals affiliated with manufacturing organizations in the Pune region of Maharashtra, India. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire administered through direct field interactions and online survey procedures. Respondents were recruited through purposive sampling based on their professional experience with organizational HR policies and practices.

The sample comprised seven manufacturing categories: automotive (n = 120), electronics and electricals (n = 109), fast-moving consumer goods (n = 75), pharmaceuticals (n = 68), textiles (n = 49), steel and construction materials (n = 58), and other manufacturing industries (n = 41). The respondents held varied HR positions within their organizations, thereby offering perspectives on formal HR commitments, organizational initiatives, and estimated levels of employee participation. The unit of observation was an individual HR professional. Because several respondents may have been affiliated with the same employer, the 520 observations should not be understood as representing 520 distinct manufacturing organizations. Furthermore, the use of purposive recruitment restricts the statistical generalizability of the findings beyond the surveyed population.

3.2 Measurement and Operationalization of Variables

The questionnaire included measures addressing organizational policy endorsement, the implementation of spirituality-informed HR practices, perceived employee receptivity, organizational support mechanisms, and workforce participation. Policy endorsement was defined operationally by the presence of explicit organizational policies supporting spirituality-based HR practices (ADSBHR5), while reported organizational adoption was measured through the related implementation statement (ADSBHR1). Employee receptivity was assessed through HR professionals' evaluations of employee responses to these initiatives (ADSBHR6). These indicators were measured using five-point Likert-type response categories.

The primary dependent variable was the proportion of employees, as reported by HR professionals, who actively participated in organizational spirituality-related activities. In the original questionnaire, participation was captured through four ordered categories: less than 25%, above 25% to 50%, above 50% to 75%, and more than 75%. These categories were preserved as ordinal responses and were not transformed into continuous percentage estimates. Other explanatory variables comprised the organizational allocation of designated participation time, internal communication, review of employee

feedback, perceived conceptual ambiguity, activity frequency, and organizational size.

These measures constitute individual questionnaire indicators rather than newly developed multidimensional psychometric constructs. Accordingly, the analysis does not use the original questionnaire's overall reliability coefficient to establish construct validity or the independent reliability of its scales. This distinction maintains alignment between the specified measurement model and the statistical procedures applied.

3.3 Statistical Analysis

The primary survey data was examined through descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means, and standard deviations were used to summarize organizational policy endorsement, reported adoption, and employee participation. A paired-samples t-test assessed the within-respondent difference between policy endorsement and reported adoption, whereas the Wilcoxon signed-rank test served as a nonparametric sensitivity analysis. The paired mean difference was evaluated alongside its 95% confidence interval and standardized effect size.

Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to evaluate the monotonic relationship between the policy–adoption score difference and the ordered participation categories. Thereafter, ordinal logistic regression was conducted to determine whether selected HR policy and implementation indicators were related to greater reported participation. The model incorporated eight explanatory variables, with continuous or ordered predictors standardized according to their sample standard deviations to facilitate coefficient comparison. Model performance was assessed using the likelihood-ratio chi-square statistic, odds ratios, 95% confidence intervals, and McFadden's pseudo-R^2.

As an additional sensitivity analysis, binary logistic regression compared participation above 50% with participation at or below 50% by using an alternative outcome classification. The Benjamini–Hochberg procedure was used to control the false discovery rate among the eight exploratory tests of predictors. Statistical significance was evaluated at a nominal 5% threshold. Given the cross-sectional and nonexperimental design of the research, the estimated associations were interpreted without assigning causal effects to organizational policies or implementation practices.

4 Results

This section presents the empirical findings concerning the relationship between formal HR policy commitments, organizational adoption, and actual employee participation in values-oriented workplace initiatives. Descriptive and inferential analyses are employed to identify discrepancies between institutional support and workforce engagement, highlighting the extent to which formal policy commitments translate into meaningful employee participation.

4.1 The policy–adoption contrast and employee reach

Table 1 reveals a marked asymmetry between organizational declarations and reported reach. The average endorsement of clear policies was 4.03 (SD = 0.87), whereas agreement that practices had been adopted averaged 3.57 (SD = 0.97). The within-respondent mean difference was 0.463 points (95% CI [0.381, 0.546]), $t(519) = 11.04$, $p < .001$, paired standardized mean difference $d_z = 0.48$. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test confirmed that the conclusion was not attributable solely to the paired t-test specification ($p < .001$). Positive employee response was rated 3.74 (SD = 0.94), a further 0.287-point difference from policy endorsement (95% CI [0.228, 0.345], $p < .001$). These

are differences between related yet non-identical questionnaire statements, and not independently audited gaps between actual policy and practice.

Table 1. Policy endorsement, reported adoption and participation (N = 520)

Indicator	Estimate	Interpretive boundary
Clear adoption policies	M = 4.03; SD = 0.87	Five-point HR endorsement item
Practices reportedly adopted	M = 3.57; SD = 0.97	Five-point HR implementation item
Employees respond positively	M = 3.74; SD = 0.94	HR judgment; not employee self-report
Policy minus adoption	ΔM = 0.46; 95% CI [0.38, 0.55]	Paired t (519) = 11.04; p < .001
Participation under 25%	155 / 520 (29.8%)	Reported organization-level share
Participation above 25%–50%	175 / 520 (33.7%)	Reported organization-level share
Participation above 50%–75%	114 / 520 (21.9%)	Reported organization-level share
Participation over 75%	76 / 520 (14.6%)	Reported organization-level share

Taken together, 330 of 520 respondents (63.5%, Wilson 95% CI [59.2%, 67.5%]) placed workforce participation at 50% or below, whereas 190 (36.5%, 95% CI [32.5%, 40.8%]) placed participation above that threshold. Across respondents, 72.3% selected agreement levels 4 or 5 for the existence of clear policies, compared with 53.5% for adoption. Crucially, the policy-minus-adoption difference had almost no monotonic relationship with participation category, Spearman $\rho = -.017$, $p = .694$. Differences in what HR professionals endorsed as policy were not a reliable guide to how widely workers were said to participate.

4.2 Participation model and robustness

The eight-predictor ordered logit did not meaningfully improve upon the intercept-only ordinal distribution, likelihood-ratio χ^2 (8) = 7.89, p = .445, McFadden pseudo-R^2 = .0057. The estimates in Table 2 are expressed as odds ratios for a one-standard-deviation increase in each predictor. Neither clear policy, stated adoption, time allocation, communication, feedback review, more frequent activities nor larger company size showed a reliable independent association with higher employee participation. Conceptual ambiguity yielded a positive exploratory association, OR = 1.19, 95% CI [1.02, 1.40], p = .028. This counterintuitive item-level signal did not survive Benjamini–Hochberg adjustment (q = .223) and arose in a globally non-significant model; it therefore cannot support a substantive claim that ambiguity increases participation.

Table 2. Ordered-logistic estimates for higher employee participation (N = 520)

Survey-based predictor	OR	95% CI	p
Clear adoption policies	1.10	[0.90, 1.34]	.371
Reported implementation	1.09	[0.90, 1.32]	.401
Designated time during work	0.90	[0.74, 1.09]	.272
Internal communication	1.03	[0.85, 1.26]	.758
Employee-feedback review	1.01	[0.83, 1.23]	.890
Conceptual ambiguity (barrier)	1.19	[1.02, 1.40]	.028
Frequency of activities	1.01	[0.86, 1.18]	.954
Company size	1.01	[0.87, 1.18]	.864

Note: OR = proportional odds ratio for a one-standard-deviation increases in a predictor; CI = Wald 95% confidence interval. More frequent activity was reverse-coded. Global model: likelihood-ratio χ^2 (8) = 7.89, p = .445; McFadden pseudo-R^2 = .006. Individual p values are unadjusted; the smallest false-discovery-rate-adjusted q was .223.

The prespecified binary sensitivity check more than 50% participation versus 50% or less—was likewise weak (likelihood-ratio test p = .665; McFadden pseudo-R^2 = .0086). The ambiguity coefficient did not reach the conventional .05 threshold in this alternative specification (OR = 1.19, p = .062), further discouraging substantive interpretation of a single positive ordinal coefficient. Model weakness itself is pertinent: the recorded HR signals explain little of the variation in perceived participation, even though policy and support items are evaluated favourably in the same responses.

5 Discussion

The study interprets the empirical findings in relation to existing literature, emphasizing the distinction between formal HR policy commitments and actual implementation. It critically examines the policy–participation gap and its implications for organizational effectiveness and meaningful employee engagement.

5.1 Policy visibility should not be mistaken for implementation

The central empirical finding is a difference between favourable descriptions of formal arrangements and less favourable assessments of their enactment, alongside comparatively limited HR-reported employee participation. This pattern resembles the implementation distinctions identified by Khilji and Wang (2006) and Piening et al. (2014). However, the data cannot establish whether organizations are intentionally projecting commitment without delivery. Strong endorsement and weaker adoption may coexist because policies are recent, activities are voluntary, shift-based access is unequal, or participation opportunities appeal to only some employees. The concept of decoupling is therefore used as an interpretive lens, not as an empirically proven organizational diagnosis (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Bromley & Powell, 2012).

The low explanatory power of the participation model adds nuance to the HR-system strength literature. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) emphasized the importance of coherent signals, but neither visible policy nor isolated communication or support measures sufficed here to distinguish participation categories. In keeping with Nishii et al. (2008), it may matter what employees believe the practices are for. Survey items about formal adoption offer little insight into whether workers experience these activities as useful, optional, culturally welcoming, compatible with their shifts, or potentially coercive. Without employee-level accounts, the mechanism remains unobserved.

5.2 Why non-significant participation predictors matter

It would be misleading to treat the absence of statistically significant coefficients as proof that support interventions have no effect. The outcome is coarse, estimated indirectly by HR professionals, and potentially subject to ceiling effects in several support items. Omitted variables such as line-manager encouragement, shift assignment, employment status, trust in confidentiality, and individual program preferences may be more proximal to actual attendance than high-level policy statements. Moreover, a cross-sectional association test is neither an intervention study nor a longitudinal assessment of implementation. Even so, the weak model makes a substantive point: HR endorsement is not sufficient proxy for worker reach.

A further concern relates to constructing boundaries. The questionnaire encompasses mindfulness, yoga, ethics discussions, prayer-oriented activities, cultural celebrations and mentorship. These initiatives may differ widely in acceptability and legal or ethical implications. Workplace spirituality in Ashmos and Duchon's (2000) sense cannot automatically be equated with attendance at religiously marked activities. A pluralistic manufacturing workforce may engage with the same program for different reasons, and non-

participation may reflect a legitimate preference rather than a failed HR outcome. Accordingly, a goal of maximal participation would be as problematic as assuming that provision alone is sufficient evidence of success.

5.3 Implications for theory and practice

By empirically differentiating three interrelated but conceptually distinct dimensions formal policy endorsement, reported implementation, and estimated workforce participation the findings contribute to the literature on strategic HRM and organizational implementation. The statistically significant gap between policy endorsement and organizational adoption, together with the limited explanatory power of the participation model, indicates that favorable managerial assessments of HR policies ought not to be regarded as sufficient evidence that employees are extensively engaged. This distinction broadens the applicability of HR implementation-gap perspectives (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Piening et al., 2014) and of institutional decoupling theory (Bromley & Powell, 2012) to values-oriented workplace initiatives. Methodologically, the research shows why employee participation should be treated as a distinct outcome and why statistically non-significant multivariable findings should be interpreted in conjunction with significant descriptive contrasts. From a managerial standpoint, the findings underscore the need to assess not merely whether HR policies exist but also their accessibility, their practical implementation, voluntary participation, and the experiences of employees. The contribution thus consists in advancing a participation-sensitive approach to evaluating values-oriented HR practices, one that does not presume that formal organizational commitments will necessarily yield corresponding behavioral outcomes.

6 Limitations, Research Agenda and Conclusion

The study relies on HR-reported cross-sectional survey responses from a nonprobability sample in one regional manufacturing setting. A respondent is not necessarily an independent organization, and common-source reporting may inflate perceived coherence among policy items. Participation is reported in broad ordered brackets rather than verified from actual attendance counts; a ceiling in positive item endorsements may reduce statistical discrimination. The paired policy and adoption items represent related yet distinct judgments, so their difference is not a validated scale of "decoupling." The proportional-odds assumption was not formally evaluated, which limits interpretation of the ordinal regression estimates. The binary logistic analysis provides a sensitivity assessment using an alternative outcome categorization but does not establish the validity of this assumption. Exploratory tests involve multiple comparisons, and the single nominally significant item did not survive false-discovery-rate correction. The questionnaire also includes religiously marked activities, limiting the appropriateness of interpreting all items as secular workplace spirituality.

Future work should pair HR policy reports with employee-level, shift-stratified data on awareness, perceived voluntariness, accessibility and actual participation; incorporate records on program frequency and attendance; and follow implementation longitudinally. Multilevel designs could separate employees, production units and organizations, test measurement invariance across workforce groups, and examine whether changes in reach preceded independently measured well-being or operational outcomes. Such designs would make it possible to discriminate genuine implementation deficits from voluntary non-uptake and from HR managers' optimistic reporting.

In conclusion, favourable policy assessments do not guarantee broad engagement with workplace-values initiatives. Within 520 Pune manufacturing HR responses, clear-policy endorsement exceeded reported adoption, and fewer than four in ten respondents described participation by most employees. The available implementation and support indicators explained little variation in reported reach. The practical message is not to abandon workplace meaning or value-oriented HRM, but to evaluate these efforts where they ultimately matter: in employees' accessible, voluntary and independently verified experiences.

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