

ORIGINAL

The Dark Side of Performance Metrics: Dehumanisation and Its Impact on Faculty Engagement

El lado oscuro de las métricas de rendimiento: la deshumanización y su impacto en el compromiso del profesorado

Daru K.S.¹  , Praveena K.¹ 

¹SCMS School of Technology and Management, Kalamassery. India.

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Corresponding author: Daru K.S. 

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of organisational dehumanisation on work engagement among faculty members in private higher educational institutions. Drawing upon the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the research explores how work stress mediates the relationship between organisational dehumanisation and work engagement. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with over 500 faculty members across private institutions in southern India. Organisational dehumanisation, work engagement, and work stress were measured using validated scales, and the data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM, AMOS). The results reveal that organisational dehumanisation significantly increases work stress, which in turn negatively impacts work engagement. While the direct influence of organisational dehumanisation on work engagement was not statistically significant, the indirect effect, mediated through organisational work stress, was significant, highlighting stress as a key mechanism through which dehumanisation erodes engagement. The study contributes theoretically by extending COR theory to the academic context and practically by underscoring the need for human-centred organisational practices in higher education. Organisational culture and institutional leaders are urged to minimise dehumanising practices and foster psychologically supportive environments to sustain faculty motivation and institutional effectiveness. These findings hold critical implications for addressing the growing faculty burnout and attrition in India's higher education sector.

Keywords: Organisational Dehumanization; Work Stress; Work Engagement; Higher Education; Faculties.

RESUMEN

Este estudio investiga el impacto de la deshumanización organizacional en el compromiso laboral entre los miembros del cuerpo docente de instituciones privadas de educación superior. Basándose en la teoría de la conservación de recursos (COR), la investigación explora cómo el estrés laboral media la relación entre la deshumanización organizacional y el compromiso laboral. Se realizó una encuesta transversal a más de 500 miembros del personal docente de instituciones privadas del sur de la India. La deshumanización organizativa, el compromiso laboral y el estrés laboral se midieron utilizando escalas validadas, y los datos se analizaron mediante modelos de ecuaciones estructurales (SEM, AMOS). Los resultados revelan que la deshumanización organizativa aumenta significativamente el estrés laboral, lo que a su vez repercute negativamente en el compromiso laboral. Si bien la influencia directa de la deshumanización organizativa en el compromiso laboral no fue estadísticamente significativa, el efecto indirecto, mediado por el estrés laboral organizativo,

sí lo fue, lo que pone de relieve el estrés como mecanismo clave a través del cual la deshumanización erosiona el compromiso. El estudio contribuye teóricamente al ampliar la teoría COR al contexto académico y, en la práctica, al subrayar la necesidad de prácticas organizativas centradas en el ser humano en la educación superior. Se insta a la cultura organizativa y a los líderes institucionales a minimizar las prácticas deshumanizadoras y a fomentar entornos psicológicamente favorables para mantener la motivación del profesorado y la eficacia institucional. Estos hallazgos tienen implicaciones fundamentales para abordar el creciente agotamiento y desgaste del profesorado en el sector de la educación superior de la India.

Palabras clave: Deshumanización Organizativa; Estrés Laboral; Compromiso Laboral; Educación Superior; Profesorado.

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive landscape, organisations are continuously working to secure a competitive advantage by improving their productivity.⁽¹⁾ However, in this pursuit, companies often place excessive demands on their employees through heavy workloads and inflexible structures, while overlooking the human aspect of work, leading to mistreatment. Traditionally, many harmful behaviours within organisations have been attributed to leadership styles, such as abusive supervision and despotic leadership, with some viewing organisations as passive bystanders in these situations Akram et al.⁽²⁾; Sun & Cheng⁽³⁾. It has also been observed that organisations themselves can contribute to harm to employees, creating barriers and stress through factors like overwhelming work demands, lack of support, workplace bullying, and poor social support from supervisors and colleagues Gibney et al.⁽⁴⁾; Agarwal et al.⁽⁵⁾; Liu et al.⁽⁶⁾. The negative impact of such organisational behaviours has become a growing concern, as it erodes employees' psychological resources Irshad & Bashir⁽⁷⁾; Pereira & Mohiya⁽⁸⁾. Faculty members in higher educational institutions are increasingly burdened by demands related to teaching, research, administrative duties, and performance metrics.^(9,10,11) These pressures, often intensified by limited resources and rigid institutional structures, can foster perceptions of organisational dehumanisation, where individuals feel treated as impersonal tools rather than valued contributors Bell & Khoury⁽¹²⁾. Such perceptions diminish autonomy, respect, and recognition, leading to adverse psychological and behavioral outcomes.⁽¹³⁾

Fousia & Aboobaker⁽¹⁴⁾; Christoff⁽¹⁵⁾. These experiences can heighten work-related stress, which may reduce work engagement; a critical construct reflecting energy, commitment, and immersion in one's professional role.⁽¹⁶⁾ High engagement among faculty is vital for sustaining teaching quality, research excellence, and institutional growth.^(17,18,19)

India's higher education sector is experiencing a critical faculty shortage, which affects both public and private institutions. Although comprehensive data on private institutions is limited, estimates suggest that faculty vacancies exceed 30 %, undermining the overall quality of education.^(20,21) This shortage is particularly acute in professional and technical disciplines, where rapid institutional growth has outpaced the supply of qualified educators.^(21,22) Addressing this issue calls for systemic reforms, including streamlined recruitment processes, improved working conditions, and competitive compensation packages to attract and retain a strong academic workforce.⁽²³⁾

Although several studies have explored factors influencing work engagement, the impact of organizational dehumanization remains under-investigated, especially in academic settings. Furthermore, work stress may serve as a key mediator in this relationship, explaining how dehumanizing environments undermine engagement. This study explores the relationship between organizational dehumanization and work engagement among faculty members, focusing on the mediating role of work stress. The findings aim to inform strategies that enhance faculty well-being and institutional effectiveness.

Relationship between organisational dehumanisation and work engagement

In recent years organisational dehumanization has increasingly been recognized as a key factor that affects employees' attitudes and well-being across various occupational contexts, including higher education Abou Zeid et al.⁽²⁴⁾; Mason & Megoran⁽²⁵⁾; Caesens et al.⁽²⁶⁾. Within academic institutions, this phenomenon poses a serious threat to employee engagement, as it involves the perception that individuals are being treated not as human beings with emotions, replaceable, or merely functional entities for striving for organizational goals.^(15,27) In private higher academic environments, this often becomes evident through rigid bureaucracies, limited autonomy, unrealistic work expectations, and a lack of emotional or psychological support. These conditions are deeply linked to the casualization and precarity of academic labor, which can render individuals invisible, leave them vulnerable to exploitation, and deny them academic freedom.⁽²⁵⁾ These factors tend to erode work engagement, as Schaufeli et al.⁽²⁸⁾ stated, as an individual state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Research has consistently shown that when faculty members perceive themselves as being dehumanized, they are more likely to lose motivation, experience emotional fatigue, and psychologically detach from their roles.^(29,30,31) Such experiences disrupt core psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and connection to others, which are crucial for maintaining internal motivation and engagement.^(32,33) For educators, whose professional satisfaction often stems from meaningful intellectual work and a sense of purpose, impersonal treatment can be particularly damaging. It may even threaten their sense of identity and passion for the job.⁽³⁴⁾

Moreover, when organizational culture prioritizes performance over people, it often leads to environments where psychological safety and a sense of meaning are lacking, both are essential for nurturing engagement.^(35,36) Nguyen et al.⁽³⁷⁾ argue that workplaces characterized by a disregard for human dignity contribute to emotional withdrawal and reduced job commitment. Similarly, Trépanier et al.⁽³⁸⁾ highlight how overly controlling leadership styles, common in such environments, negatively influence both well-being and engagement levels. In academic institutions where faculty are frequently assessed through rigid benchmarks and performance metrics,⁽³⁹⁾ these conditions can foster alienation and burnout. Altogether, the evidence strongly supports a negative link between organizational dehumanization and work engagement, particularly in academic settings where the human element of work is often overshadowed by institutional expectations.

Relationship between organizational dehumanization and work stress

Organizational dehumanization has been closely linked to heightened levels of work-related stress, particularly in settings where individuals feel reduced to mere functions rather than recognized as people. At its core, dehumanization involves the sense of being treated more like a tool or a resource than a person with thoughts, emotions, and needs.^(15,27) This perception disrupts fundamental psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness,^(32,33) often leading to emotional strain, anxiety, and burnout.^(29,31)

In the private higher education environment, these issues can be more, faculty members are frequently burdened by unrealistic performance expectations: growing administrative responsibilities, research and publication, and limited emotional or institutional support. These stressors can intensify feelings of dehumanization.^(39,40) Research has shown a clear link between perceived dehumanization and increased stress, particularly when faculty feel replaceable or neglected by their institutions.^(13,41) This sense of emotional erosion is often multiplied under authoritarian leadership or rigid management practices that suppress autonomy and reduce psychological safety.^(38,42) Therefore, in mentally and emotionally demanding fields like higher education, organizational dehumanization serves as a powerful contributor to faculty stress and emotional fatigue.

Research objectives

1. To measure the levels of organisational dehumanisation, work engagement, and work-related stress among faculty members in private higher education institutions.
2. To understand the significant relationship between organizational dehumanization, work engagement, and work-related stress among faculty in private higher education institutions.
3. To assess whether work-related stress mediates the relationship between organisational dehumanisation and work engagement among faculty members in private higher education institutions.

METHOD

Research design and setting

A cross-sectional study was conducted across private higher educational institutions in Southern India using a simple random sampling method. Google Forms were distributed to the principals of these institutions, who were asked to share the survey link with faculty members.

Participants and sample size calculation

To test the hypothesised relationships, data were collected from faculty members at higher education institutions (HEIs) in South India. The survey was administered online via Google Forms, consistent with prior studies employing digital data collection methods. Data collection occurred between October and December 2024. Based on the sample size recommendation of Krejcie and Morgan⁽⁴³⁾, which suggests a minimum of 384 responses, data collection was concluded after receiving over 500 valid responses. This sample size also aligns with Comrey and Lee's⁽⁴⁴⁾ criteria, which categorise samples exceeding 500 as "good" for statistical analysis.

Measurements

Researchers prepared a self-administered questionnaire by incorporating the three constructs, measured using validated scales from the existing literature.

Organizational dehumanization scale

Organizational dehumanization was measured by adopting a validated scale developed by Caesens et al.⁽²⁶⁾

from the existing literature, consisting of 11 items. Faculty members were asked to indicate their rate of agreement with each statement. Respondents' responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. 5 represented for "strongly agree, 4 for 'agree', 3 for 'neutral', 2 for 'disagree', and 1 for 'strongly disagree'." The items were scored from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating stronger agreement of respondents with each statement.

Work Engagement Scale

Researchers used the Schaufeli et al.⁽²⁸⁾ shortened version scale to measure work engagement, employing the nine-item short version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), a widely recognised instrument known for its strong theoretical grounding, validated structure, and practical applicability. Participants rated each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The UWES evaluates engagement across three dimensions: vigour, dedication, and absorption. Absorption reflects complete focus and contentment in one's work, while vigour signifies high energy levels and mental resilience during tasks. Dedication measures individuals' sense of significance, enthusiasm, and inspiration towards their work. By responding to statements related to these dimensions, employees enable organisations to assess and analyse the level of engagement within their workforce. Due to its robust theoretical foundation, extensive validation, and practical utility, the UWES has gained widespread popularity as a tool for measuring work engagement

Work stress scale

Work stress was measured by adapting a standardised scale developed by De Bruin⁽⁴⁵⁾, consisting of nine items, on a five-point Likert scale anchored from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Higher scores on the scale indicate greater levels of work-related stress experienced by the faculty in private higher educational institutions, while lower scores reflect the faculty's lower stress levels.

Theoretical background and hypothesis development

The present study is grounded in the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory Hobfoll⁽⁴⁶⁾, which posits that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect valuable resources, such as energy, autonomy, and self-worth. When these resources are threatened or lost, individuals experience stress, impairing their well-being and performance. In this context, organizational dehumanization, defined as the perception of being treated as an object or tool rather than a human being,⁽²⁶⁾ is a significant resource threat, undermining faculty members' dignity, autonomy, and sense of belonging. According to COR theory, such perceived dehumanization triggers work stress as a psychological response to resource loss.⁽⁴⁸⁾ This stress, in turn, depletes the cognitive and emotional resources necessary for work engagement, a positive, fulfilling work-related state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.⁽²⁸⁾ Thus, COR theory provides a coherent explanation for the proposed model, where organizational dehumanization increases work stress, which subsequently reduces faculty members' engagement.

Hypothesis development

The building block of this study is the conservation of resources (COR) theory Hobfoll⁽⁴⁶⁾, which argues that individuals are always driven to acquire, maintain, and safeguard valued resources: autonomy, self-worth, and emotional energy. People become stressed when employees perceive that these resources are lost or threatened, which in turn can undermine employees' ability to function positively in the workplace. With this theoretical vision, the construct of organizational dehumanization is defined as the individual's perception of being treated as less than human or as a means a tool to achieve organizational goals Caesens et al.⁽³⁰⁾, represents a significant resource threat for faculty members, as it undermines their sense of value, dignity, and psychological safety.

When faculty experience dehumanizing treatment from their institution (excessive control, lack of recognition, micromanagement, and excessive workloads), this can trigger work stress, a psychological response to the perceived or actual loss of resources.⁽⁴⁶⁾ According to prior studies, such stress can deplete the emotional and cognitive resources needed to remain engaged at work Bakker & Demerouti⁽⁴⁷⁾. Work engagement, defined as a positive, fulfilling state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption Schaufeli et al.⁽¹⁶⁾, is dependent on the availability of adequate personal and job-related resources.

Therefore, based on prior empirical and theoretical work, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. H1: organisational dehumanisation has a significant negative influence on work engagement among faculty members in private higher educational institutions
2. H2: organisational dehumanisation has a significant influence on work stress among faculty members.
3. H3: work stress is negatively associated with work engagement among faculty members.
4. H4: work stress mediates the relationship between organisational dehumanisation and work engagement.

Conceptual model of the study

The conceptual framework for the study was developed following a comprehensive literature review.

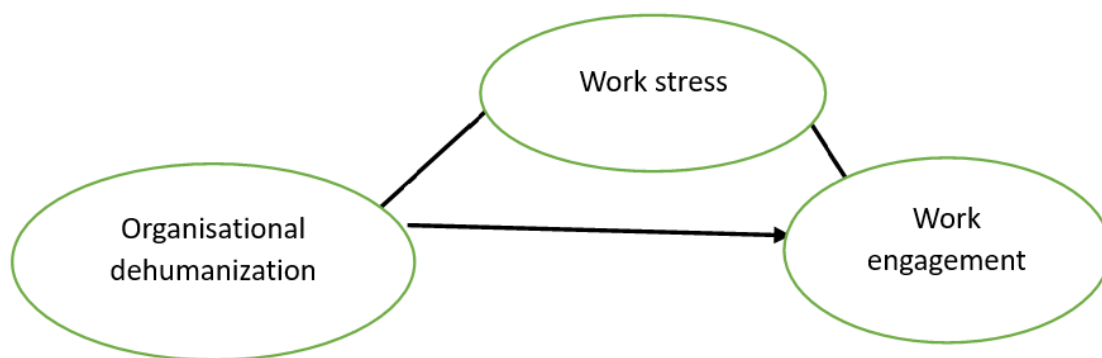


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that the study surveyed 512 faculty members from private higher education institutions, with a higher proportion of females (58 %) compared to males (42 %). Most respondents were aged between 30-40 years (41 %), followed by those aged 40-50 years (29 %), 20-30 years (18 %), and 50 years and above (12 %), indicating a predominantly mid-career workforce. In terms of qualifications, 44 % held a PhD, 32 % a Master's degree, 18 % an M.Phil., and 6 % had completed post-doctoral studies, reflecting a well-qualified academic cohort. Annual income levels varied, with 34 % earning below ₹250,000, 31 % between ₹250,000-₹500,000, 22 % between ₹500,000-₹750,000, 14 % between ₹750,000-₹1,000,000, and 6 % earning above ₹1,000,000, highlighting income disparities within the sector. Work experience also showed variation: 39 % had less than five years, 32 % had 5-10 years, 16 % had 10-15 years, and only 13 % had over 15 years, suggesting a predominantly early to mid-career academic population.

Category	Profile	Total Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	297	58
	Male	215	42
Age (in years)	20-30	94	18
	30-40	210	41
	40-50	148	29
	50 and above	59	12
Educational Qualification	Post-Doctoral	29	6
	PhD	226	44
	M.Phil.	94	18
	Master's degree	164	32
Annual income	Below 250000	174	34
	250000- 500000	159	31
	500000-750000	114	22
	750000-1000000	74	14
	Over 1000000	31	6
Experience	less than 5	198	39
	5-10	167	32
	10-15	82	16
	15-20	38	7
	20-25	18	3
	>25	9	2

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, Reliability and Validity

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	OD	WS	WE	Cronbach Alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
OD	2,69	1,25	1	0,45	0,51	0,85	0,863	0,55
WS	2,34	1,38	0,47	1	0,48	0,89	0,892	0,62
WE	3,81	2,04	0,51	0,49	1	0,90	0,898	0,71

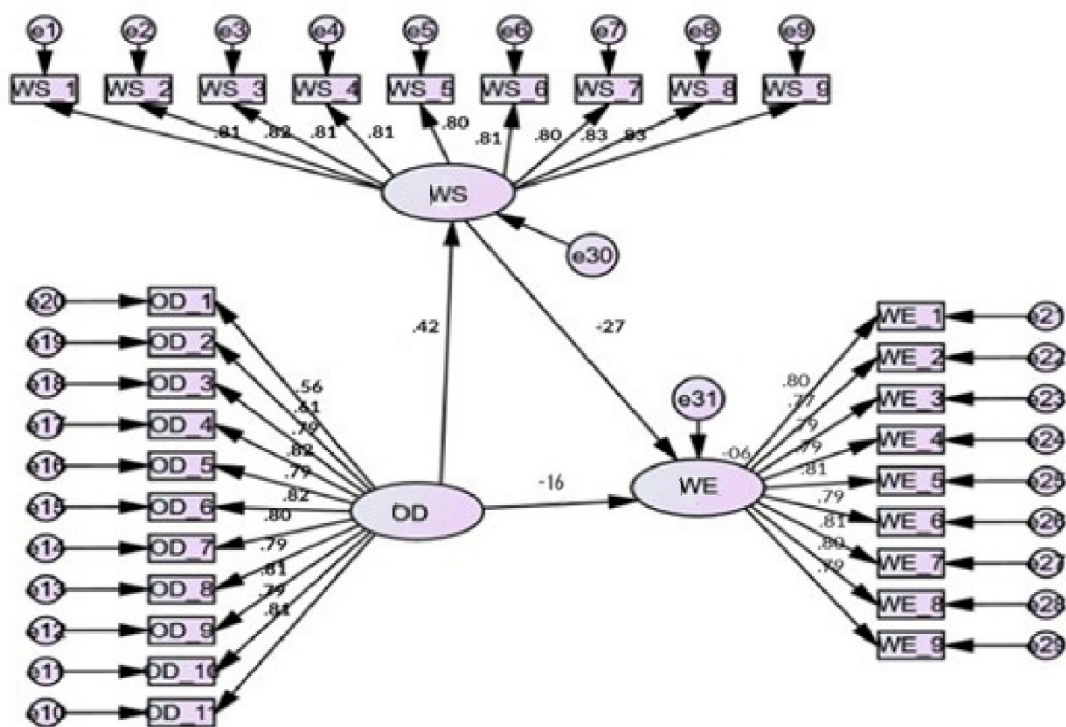
To ensure the study's reliability, the researcher verified that all Cronbach's alpha values for the latent variables surpassed the permissible threshold of internal consistency level as recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein. The composite reliability score for all the latent variables was higher than the 0,7 threshold, and all, without exception, exceeded 0,8, which ensured good construct reliability among the variables, as indicated by Fornell and Larcker⁽⁴⁸⁾. Subsequently, researchers scrutinised the convergent and discriminant validities. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each latent variable exceeds the threshold of 0,5, ensuring convergent validity as per Fornell and Larcker⁽⁴⁸⁾, so the study ensured convergent validity.

Table 3. Correlation between study variables

Variable	Work stress	Work engagement
Organisational dehumanization	0,367**	-0,043
Work stress		-0,265**

Table 3 illustrates the correlation matrix between organisational dehumanisation, general work stress, and work engagement among private higher educational faculties. It shows that organizational dehumanization in faculties was positively and significantly correlated with work stress ($r = 0,367$, $P < 0,01$), whereas it had an insignificant negative correlation with work engagement ($r = -0,043$). Additionally, general work stress was negatively correlated with work engagement ($r = -0,265$, $P < 0,01$).

To test the study's hypotheses, the authors used regression analysis to examine the direct effect of organizational dehumanization as an independent variable on faculty work engagement, excluding the influence of general work stress. A structural equation model was employed to assess the indirect effect, where the relationship between organizational dehumanization and faculty work engagement is mediated by general work stress (figure 1).

**Figure 2.** Mediation model

Model fit indices

The model fitness was ensured with the statistical tool AMOS. The fit indices furnished in the table indicate the range of fit for the model.

Table 4. Model fit indices			
Measure	Name	Value	Threshold limit
Chi-Square value(χ^2)	Likelihood Ratio Chi-square	664,323	p-value>0,05
CMIN	CMIN/ Degree of Freedom	1,739	Below 5
(χ^2 /DF)	(Adjusted) Goodness of Fit	0,961	GFI>0,90
(A)GFI			
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation	0,058	RMSEA<0,08
AVE	Average Variance Explained	0,612	612 AVE>0,5

Table 5. Mediation effect of faculties' work stress between faculties' organizational Dehumanisation and faculties' work stress					
	Standardized Regression Weights	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Organizational dehumanization to work stress	0,436	0,464	0,083	5,502	0,000
General work stress to work engagement	-0,257	-0,366	0,112	-3,301	0,000
The direct effect of organizational dehumanization on work engagement	0,139	0,206	0,118	1,739	0,081
Indirect effect of organizational dehumanization on work engagement	-0,118				
Total effect	0,016				0,000

The findings in table 5 indicate that organizational dehumanization of faculties had a positive, significant influence on general work stress ($r = 0,436$, $p < 0,001$), which supports hypothesis H2. It was also found that general work stress had a negative influence on work engagement ($r = -0,257$, $p < 0,001$). Furthermore, when general work stress was incorporated into the model, the direct relationship between organizational dehumanization and job engagement was no longer significant, and the beta coefficient was reduced to ($r = 0,139$, $P = 0,081$). The bootstrapping test confirmed that the indirect effect of organizational dehumanization on work engagement through general work stress was significant, as the result (-0,118) did not include zero, based on 5,000 resamples. These results suggest that general work stress among private higher educational faculties mediates the relationship between organizational dehumanization and work engagement. The model's fit is deemed satisfactory as shown in Fig. 1, with values ($X^2 = 664,332$, $df = 363$, $X^2/df = 1,843$, $CFI = 0,913$, $TLI = 0,926$, $RMSEA = 0,058$).

DISCUSSION

Organisational dehumanisation, where employees are treated as less than human, has been identified as a key contributor to disengagement. However, the mediating role of stress in this relationship remains underexplored in academic settings.⁽³⁰⁾ While some studies have examined the direct effects of dehumanisation on work outcomes, there is a need for further research on how work stress mediates this process, particularly in faculty environments.⁽⁴¹⁾ This study, employing the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory as its theoretical framework, explored the relationship between organisational dehumanisation, work stress, and work engagement among private higher education faculty members in South India. The findings provide valuable insights, particularly emphasising the role of work stress as a mediator in the relationship between organisational dehumanisation and work engagement, thereby expanding our understanding of the dynamics that affect faculty engagement in academic settings.

Firstly, in line with the COR theory,⁽⁴⁶⁾ the study's results support the notion that when faculty members experience organisational dehumanisation, they perceive treatment as impersonal tools rather than valued contributors. Faculties might experience a loss of psychological resources, such as autonomy, dignity, and self-worth. This loss triggers heightened levels of work stress,^(30,46) which, in turn, undermines their work engagement.⁽¹⁶⁾ The positive significant influence of organisational dehumanisation on work stress is consistent

with previous research indicating that dehumanising work environments are closely linked, and thereby create higher levels of stress among employees.^(29,31) This relationship is particularly concerning in academic settings, where faculties work engagement is crucial to the quality of teaching, research, and institutional growth.^(18,28)

One of the significant contributions of this study is its confirmation that work stress partially mediates the relationship between organizational dehumanization and work engagement. Although the direct effect of organizational dehumanization on work engagement was not statistically significant, the indirect effect through work stress was notably significant. This also aligns with prior studies that work stress is a critical mechanism through which dehumanization impacts employee attitudes and behaviors.^(24,25,49) Thus, the study findings suggest that dehumanization does not directly reduce work engagement, but rather acts as a reason for the depletion of personal resources among employees, which in turn increases stress and decreases engagement. This theoretical extension is consistent with the findings of Andrighetto et al.⁽²⁹⁾ and Caesens et al.⁽³⁰⁾, who emphasize the importance of psychological stress as a mediator in understanding the consequences of organizational dehumanization.

Moreover, this study found that the indirect effect of organizational dehumanization on work engagement was significant, emphasizing the importance of managing work stress to mitigate the negative impact of dehumanizing practices. This result highlights the need for institutions to address the root causes of stress, such as excessive workload, lack of support, and micromanagement.⁽¹³⁾ To reduce the effect of these stressors, educational institutions can create a work environment that fosters higher levels of work engagement, which, as Schaufeli et al.⁽¹⁶⁾ noted, is essential for sustaining faculty motivation and institutional effectiveness. As shown by the current findings, addressing work stress may be an effective strategy to buffer the harmful effects of organisational dehumanisation on faculty engagement.^(50,51)

These findings also contribute to the growing body of literature on faculty well-being, particularly in the context of India's private higher education sector, which is facing significant challenges related to faculty burnout and attrition.^(20,22) As faculty members are increasingly burdened by teaching, research, and administrative duties,⁽²³⁾ the dehumanisation they experience in the workplace may further exacerbate stress levels and reduce their engagement with their academic roles. So, this study underscores the critical need for institutional leaders to reframe their approach to faculty management, focusing on reducing stressors and fostering a more supportive and human-centred organisational culture.^(14,35,52,53)

CONCLUSION

This research investigated the relationship between organizational dehumanization and work engagement, the mediating effect of faculties' work stress. The findings of this study report that the proposed hypothesis stating that organizational dehumanization negatively impacts faculty engagement was proven with strong empirical evidence, and also it is more prominent through its contribution to increased work stress. Further, it underscores that the faculty members who perceive their organisations as impersonal and instrumentalist in achieving goals and are more likely to experience psychological stress and strain, which diminishes their vigour, dedication, and absorption in academic roles. So, these results reveal the nuanced importance of how the organisational culture and leadership practices that foster humanity affect academic professionals' motivation and well-being. Also, the partial mediation effect of organisational work stress reveals that dehumanisation has a significant influence on engagement, and a significant portion of its influence is triggered through increased organisational stress levels. Therefore, to enhance faculty's work engagement, institutions need to confront the organizational and cultural factors driving dehumanization and foster work environments that prioritize psychological safety and employee autonomy while working.

Theoretical implications

The study offers new insights by addressing underexplored variables and makes a meaningful contribution to the conservation of resources (COR) theory by positioning organizational dehumanization as a significant psychological stressor that depletes essential resources such as autonomy and self-worth among academic professionals, thereby expanding the scope and application of the theory. This research further enriches COR theory by empirically supporting the mediating role of work stress in the relationship between dehumanization and faculty engagement, addressing a key gap in higher education research. It also contributes to the emerging literature on organizational dehumanization by providing empirical evidence on how systemic, impersonal practices in academic institutions can impair employee functioning and motivation. By integrating constructs from both organizational behavior and occupational health psychology, the study presents a comprehensive framework for understanding faculty disengagement in resource-depleting environments.

Practical implications

From a practical perspective, the study offers actionable insights for institutional leaders and policymakers in the higher education sector. Organizations must prioritize policies and practices that humanize the work

environment by recognizing individual contributions, reducing unnecessary bureaucracy, and promoting employee autonomy and respect. Implementing leadership training programs focused on emotional intelligence, empathy, and inclusive communication can mitigate the effects of impersonal management. Additionally, institutions should establish robust support systems, including mental health resources, transparent feedback mechanisms, and flexible work arrangements, to help faculty cope with stress and enhance their sense of belonging. By reducing organizational dehumanization and its associated stressors, higher education institutions can foster a more engaged, productive, and resilient academic workforce.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the study's contributions, a few limitations must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences between variables; future research employing longitudinal or experimental designs is needed to establish temporal relationships. Second, reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of response bias, including social desirability effects. Third, the study's sample is restricted to faculty members from private higher educational institutions in South India, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other regions or public sector institutions. Future research should explore potential moderators such as perceived organisational support, leadership style, or emotional resilience to better understand individual and contextual variations. Comparative studies across public and private institutions, as well as mixed-methods approaches that incorporate qualitative insights, would further deepen the understanding of how organisational dehumanisation affects academic engagement and well-being.

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AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Daru K.S., Praveena K.

Formal analysis: Daru K.S.

Methodology: Daru K.S., Praveena K.

Supervision: Praveena K.

Drafting - original draft: Praveena K.

Writing - proofreading and editing: Praveena K.