

## LINKING ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE TO EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF THRIVING AT WORK AND THE MODERATING ROLE OF DIGITAL RESILIENCE

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### Abstract

This study investigates the relationships among organizational purpose, thriving at work, digital resilience, and employee engagement within higher education institutions in Pakistan. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the research examines how organizational purpose influences employee engagement, the mediating role of thriving at work, and the moderating effect of digital resilience. A cross-sectional survey of faculty and administrative staff (N = 300) was conducted, and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, and Hayes' PROCESS macro for mediation and moderation. Results indicate that organizational purpose positively predicts employee engagement, both directly and indirectly through thriving at work. Thriving at work emerges as a key psychological mechanism, linking institutional meaning and employee motivation, while digital resilience strengthens the relationship between purpose and engagement, highlighting its role as a boundary condition in technology-intensive academic environments. The study contributes theoretically by integrating organizational purpose, thriving, and digital resilience within JD-R and SDT frameworks, and practically by offering strategies for higher education leaders to foster engagement, vitality, learning, and adaptability among staff. Implications for institutional policies, professional development, and digital skill-building are discussed, alongside directions for future research on longitudinal effects and cross-cultural validation.

## INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has ushered in profound transformations in the higher education sector, marked by globalization, intensified competition, rapid technological advancements, and increasing demands for accountability and innovation (Altbach & de Wit, 2020; Marginson, 2017). The disruptive impact of digital learning platforms and the shift towards hybrid and online education

have further reshaped institutional priorities and operations (Hodges et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these changes, compelling universities and colleges to adopt new technologies and pedagogical approaches almost overnight (Rapanta et al., 2020). These shifts have not only redefined the strategic landscape of higher education but have also placed immense

pressure on faculty and administrative staff, who must continuously adapt to evolving work environments while maintaining high standards in teaching, research, and service (Watermeyer et al., 2021). As higher education institutions navigate this complex environment, the engagement and well-being of employees have become central to sustaining institutional effectiveness and academic excellence (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008).

Employee engagement, defined as a positive and fulfilling work-related state of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002), plays a pivotal role in determining institutional outcomes. In higher education, where knowledge is the primary resource, engaged faculty are more likely to innovate in their teaching practices, contribute to cutting-edge research, and actively participate in governance and community engagement (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Saks, 2019). Conversely, disengagement manifests in the form of reduced productivity, burnout, absenteeism, and turnover, all of which undermine institutional effectiveness and student success (Taris, 2006; Alzyoud, 2018). Research consistently shows that engaged employees display higher levels of commitment, resilience, and creativity, making engagement a strategic imperative for universities operating in increasingly knowledge-intensive and competitive environments (Bailey et al., 2017; Karatepe et al., 2020).

While a wide range of antecedents to engagement has been studied—including leadership, job resources, and organizational culture (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009; Alfes et al., 2013)—the concept of organizational purpose has recently attracted growing scholarly interest. Organizational purpose is defined as the institution's enduring reason for existence, extending beyond profit or operational efficiency, often encompassing broader societal contributions such as knowledge creation, ethical responsibility, and community development (Craig & Snook, 2014; Rey et al., 2019). In the context of higher education, institutional purpose is rooted in values such as intellectual growth, social mobility, and global citizenship (Etzioni, 2014). When employees perceive their institution as purpose-driven, and when that purpose

resonates with their personal values, they are more likely to feel motivated, valued, and aligned with their work, leading to higher levels of engagement (Keller, 2022; Quinn & Thakor, 2019). Purpose-driven organizations have been shown to foster stronger employee identification, well-being, and commitment, yet empirical evidence in higher education remains limited (Carton, 2018; Bailey & Madden, 2017).

Importantly, the relationship between organizational purpose and employee engagement may not be straightforward. Psychological mechanisms are likely to play an intervening role in translating purpose into sustainable engagement. One such mechanism is thriving at work, conceptualized as a psychological state characterized by the joint experience of vitality and learning (Spreitzer et al., 2005; Porath et al., 2012). Thriving is not only a marker of employee well-being but also a predictor of adaptive performance and resilience in demanding contexts (Paterson et al., 2014). In academia, thriving may manifest as faculty members who feel energized in their teaching and research while simultaneously engaging in continuous learning and professional development (Abid et al., 2016). Organizational purpose provides employees with direction and significance, which may enhance their sense of vitality and growth, thereby fostering thriving. Thriving, in turn, sustains engagement by energizing employees and equipping them to pursue institutional goals with enthusiasm and persistence (Niessen et al., 2012; Kleine et al., 2019).

At the same time, the rapidly changing and uncertain environment of higher education calls for greater attention to contextual factors that can enable or constrain the linkages among purpose, thriving, and engagement. One such factor is digital resilience, which refers to the ability to adapt to, recover from, and grow through digital disruptions and technological challenges (Mhlongo & Beharry-Ramraj, 2022). The shift towards digital learning platforms, remote work, and online administrative systems has underscored the importance of employees' digital adaptability (Bond et al., 2021). Faculty and staff who are digitally resilient are better positioned to

leverage technological tools, cope with digital stressors, and sustain engagement in uncertain and demanding work environments (Wang et al., 2020). For example, a faculty member with strong thriving capacity but low digital resilience may struggle to engage meaningfully in online teaching contexts. In contrast, one who is digitally resilient can transform digital challenges into opportunities for innovation and growth (Greener & Wakefield, 2015). Thus, digital resilience may act as a boundary condition that shapes the strength of the relationship between thriving and engagement in higher education institutions.

Despite these compelling arguments, research exploring the interrelationships between organizational purpose, thriving at work, and digital resilience in higher education remains scarce. Previous studies have predominantly examined leadership behaviors (Bass & Riggio, 2006), job characteristics (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and organizational climate (Albrecht, 2010) as antecedents of engagement, with limited empirical work on the role of institutional purpose. While thriving at work has been studied in business contexts (Spreitzer & Porath, 2014), its mediating role in higher education is still underdeveloped. Similarly, although digital transformation is reshaping the sector (Bond et al., 2021), digital resilience has rarely been integrated into engagement models. Addressing these gaps, this study proposes and tests a conceptual model in which organizational purpose predicts employee engagement through thriving at work, with digital resilience moderating the pathway between thriving and engagement.

By investigating this model, the study makes three key contributions. First, it advances employee engagement scholarship by positioning organizational purpose as a central motivational resource in higher education, extending the literature beyond traditional antecedents. Second, it highlights thriving at work as a psychological mechanism that explains how purpose translates into sustained engagement, thereby integrating insights from positive organizational psychology into higher education research. Third, it introduces digital resilience as a novel boundary condition, aligning engagement research with the

realities of contemporary, technology-driven academic environments. Together, these contributions provide theoretical insights into the mechanisms and boundary conditions of engagement and practical guidance for higher education leaders seeking to build engaged, resilient, and purpose-driven institutions.

The theoretical foundation of this study is primarily based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which posits that engagement arises when job resources help employees manage demands, achieve goals, and stimulate personal growth. In this study, organizational purpose serves as a critical job resource that provides meaning and direction, thriving at work functions as a personal resource that energizes employees, and digital resilience operates as a contextual resource that strengthens employees' ability to handle digital demands. Together, these mechanisms explain how purpose-driven institutions can sustain engagement in a rapidly evolving sector. Additionally, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) complements this perspective by emphasizing that engagement emerges when work environments satisfy basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Organizational purpose fulfills relatedness by connecting employees to a larger mission, thriving enhances competence through continuous learning, and digital resilience supports autonomy by empowering individuals to adapt effectively to technological change. By integrating JD-R and SDT, this study offers a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how purpose, thriving, and resilience jointly shape employee engagement in higher education.

### **Organizational Purpose and Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement has become one of the central constructs in organizational behavior and higher education research due to its strong links with institutional performance, workforce well-being, innovation, and academic excellence (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Saks, 2019). Universities and colleges are operating in a rapidly shifting environment: global competition for

students and research grants, digital transformation of teaching and learning, increasing demands from stakeholders such as students, governments, and accreditation bodies for accountability, and evolving expectations of work from faculty and staff. Particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, expectations for online and hybrid teaching, technological adoption, and flexible modes of work have intensified (Bond et al., 2021; Rapanta et al., 2020). These changes have exacerbated workload pressures, blurred boundaries between personal and professional life, and increased the need for motivational anchors that go beyond job design or leadership styles.

Within this context, engagement—generally conceptualized as vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002)—is essential. Empirical evidence shows that high engagement among faculty and staff contributes to higher student satisfaction, better research output, lower turnover, and stronger institutional reputation (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008; Kim et al., 2020). Conversely, disengagement is associated with burnout, diminished teaching quality, poor research performance, and weakened institutional commitment (Knight et al., 2022; Darabi et al., 2017). Although scholars have examined antecedents such as leadership, organizational culture, and job resources (Bailey et al., 2017), more recent work emphasizes deeper, value-driven motivators that can sustain engagement even during periods of crisis or transition. One such construct is organizational purpose, which has been increasingly recognized as a critical driver of engagement (Craig & Snook, 2014; Carton, 2018).

Organizational purpose refers to an institution's enduring reason for being that extends beyond profitability or operational efficiency. It encompasses broader societal, ethical, and community contributions (Gartenberg et al., 2016; Rey et al., 2019). In higher education, purpose often manifests through commitments to advancing knowledge, fostering equity and social mobility, cultivating ethical citizens, and promoting global responsibility (Keller, 2022). Unlike static mission or vision statements,

purpose is a living and authentic force that shapes institutional identity, decision-making, and practices (Hollensbe et al., 2014). Employees who perceive that their institution has a clear and meaningful purpose aligned with their own values experience stronger emotional bonds, a greater sense of significance in their roles, and a heightened willingness to invest energy in organizational activities (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Van Knippenberg, 2000).

Recent empirical studies reinforce the importance of purpose in sustaining engagement. Rosso et al. (2010) found that meaningful work is central to motivation, with organizational purpose serving as a critical source of meaning. Carton (2018) showed that clarity of purpose channels employees' attention and behaviors toward shared goals, fostering alignment and reducing ambiguity. Rey et al. (2019) similarly reported that purpose-driven organizations cultivate stronger identification and discretionary effort, which enhance engagement. Within higher education, purpose alignment has been linked to faculty satisfaction, commitment to student-centered teaching, and dedication to research excellence (O'Meara et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2020).

In related work, a 2024 study on organizational culture in Nigerian and Malaysian universities found that institutional values, beliefs, and norms strongly influence engagement, mediated by job characteristics (Ismail, Abdullahi et al., 2024). Although culture is not identical to purpose, the findings highlight the importance of value congruence and the perception that the institution represents more than transactional exchange. Similarly, a study titled *Exploring Academic Staff Engagement in a Time of Crisis and Change* (2024) demonstrated that when institutions reaffirmed their core values and purpose during disruptions, staff engagement was better maintained. Other research, such as a study on employee engagement and performance in Omani universities (ERIC, 2024), indicates that alignment with institutional mission and values contributes to engagement outcomes. More recently, ESG-aligned HR practices in Indonesian higher education institutions were found to improve performance and well-being,

underscoring the role of socially oriented purpose in sustaining engagement (Arxiv, 2025).

Despite growing recognition of its relevance, direct research explicitly linking organizational purpose to employee engagement in higher education remains underdeveloped. Much of the literature has relied on related constructs such as mission alignment or organizational culture, while fewer studies have operationalized purpose as a distinct antecedent. This gap suggests a need for research that examines how purpose sustains engagement over time and across changing institutional contexts.

The relationship between organizational purpose and engagement can be explained through established theoretical frameworks. The Job Demands–Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) highlights that engagement arises when job resources provide employees with the motivation and energy needed to manage demands. Organizational purpose serves as such a resource by offering meaning, direction, and psychological energy, which reduces ambiguity and enhances motivation even in high-demand contexts. Likewise, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) explains that engagement flourishes when employees' needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy are met. Purpose satisfies relatedness by connecting employees to a broader mission, reinforces competence by demonstrating the significance of their contributions, and supports autonomy by aligning work with personal values. Together, these theories illustrate that organizational purpose is not merely symbolic but a vital psychological and motivational resource that sustains employee engagement in higher education.

**H1: Organizational purpose is positively related to employee engagement.**

### **The Mediating Role of Thriving at Work**

Thriving at work has emerged as an important construct in positive organizational scholarship, capturing an employee's joint experience of vitality and learning (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Unlike proximal attitudinal states such as job satisfaction or momentary engagement, thriving denotes an

ongoing developmental experience: employees who thrive feel energized (vitality) and perceive themselves as growing and improving (learning) in their work roles (Porath et al., 2012). This dual nature makes thriving particularly relevant as a psychological mechanism that can convert broader, value-based organizational inputs (for example, organizational purpose) into sustained behavioral and attitudinal outcomes such as employee engagement. In knowledge-intensive and mission-driven contexts like higher education, thriving is especially salient because faculty and staff require both energy to perform demanding roles and ongoing opportunities for professional growth to remain committed and innovative (Spreitzer & Porath, 2014; Paterson et al., 2014). Empirical research over the past decade has documented links between job resources (e.g., autonomy, developmental opportunities, supportive climate) and thriving, and between thriving and a range of positive work outcomes including engagement, performance, creativity, and lower turnover intentions (Spreitzer et al., 2005; Porath et al., 2012; Paterson et al., 2014). Thriving functions as a personal resource that replenishes energy and fosters a growth orientation; employees who thrive are more likely to invest discretionary effort, experiment with new practices (important for pedagogical innovation), and persist in the face of setbacks (Spreitzer et al., 2012; Wallace et al., 2016). In higher education specifically, thriving has been associated with more effective teaching practices, greater research productivity, and adaptive responses to changing modalities of instruction (e.g., adoption of online teaching techniques), suggesting that thriving helps faculty translate institutional aims into day-to-day academic work (Abid et al., 2016; Fawns, 2022).

Given these linkages, thriving is theorized to mediate relationships between higher-order organizational characteristics and engagement. Organizational purpose, as an enduring source of meaning and direction, can provide the informational and emotional scaffolding that motivates employees to learn and remain vital at work. When purpose is clearly communicated and enacted, employees gain clarity about the

significance of their work and the types of development that are valued by the institution; this clarity encourages learning behaviors and fuels vitality because employees perceive their efforts as consequential (Carton, 2018; Rey et al., 2019). Thriving, in turn, energizes employees to engage more deeply and persistently in their roles: vitality fuels sustained effort and enthusiasm, while learning fosters competence and confidence in performing complex tasks such as curriculum redesign, research methodology updates, or community engagement initiatives (Porath et al., 2012; Niessen et al., 2012). Thus, purpose → thriving → engagement constitutes a plausible psychological pathway linking institutional meaning to observable engagement outcomes.

Current empirical evidence supports thriving's mediating role across multiple sectors and increasingly within tertiary education. Several studies in organizational and healthcare settings have found that resources such as meaningful work, leader support, and opportunities for development enhance thriving, which then predicts engagement and performance (Spreitzer & Porath, 2014; Paterson et al., 2014; Wallace et al., 2016). Recent higher education investigations have begun to replicate this pattern: research from the early 2020s indicates that faculty who report purpose alignment and access to professional development experience greater vitality and learning, which explain higher levels of teaching engagement and research activity (O'Meara et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2020). Post-pandemic studies further underscore thriving as the mechanism through which institutions that reaffirm their mission during crisis preserve staff motivation and commitment (studies on crisis adaptation, 2023–2024). Although direct longitudinal tests remain limited, cross-sectional and qualitative evidence converge on the mediating role of thriving in converting institutional cues of meaning into sustained employee engagement.

Mechanistically, thriving operates through both affective and cognitive routes. Affective vitality increases positive affect, broadens attention, and enhances persistence (Fredrickson, 2001), which facilitates deeper investment in work tasks and personal initiative – core elements of engagement.

Cognitive learning improves employees' perceived competence and self-efficacy, reducing the stress associated with novel demands and enabling more effective task performance (Bandura, 1997). Together, these routes produce a self-reinforcing cycle: thriving increases engagement, which can create feedback that fosters further learning and vitality (Porath et al., 2012). In academic settings where teaching, research, and service interact, this cyclical dynamic is particularly powerful: thriving helps faculty integrate pedagogical innovation and scholarly productivity with institutional missions, thereby generating both personal fulfillment and institutional value.

Measurement studies also support thriving's distinctiveness and relevance. Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) validated scales capture vitality and learning as correlated but separable dimensions, and subsequent psychometric work has shown that thriving predicts outcomes above and beyond related constructs such as engagement, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being (Porath et al., 2012; Paterson et al., 2014). For scholars seeking to test mediation models, thriving offers clear operationalizability and sensitivity to interventions (e.g., developmental programs, job redesign, meaning-centered communication) that practitioners can feasibly implement in higher education contexts (Spreitzer & Porath, 2014).

Despite these strengths, gaps remain. First, relatively few longitudinal or experimental studies have established temporal precedence needed to confirm thriving as a mediator (i.e., purpose → thriving → later engagement). Second, the contextual contingencies that might weaken or strengthen the mediating effect of thriving – for example, institutional bureaucracy, resource scarcity, or digital stressors – are not fully mapped, particularly in diverse higher education systems (public vs. private, research-intensive vs. teaching-focused) and in low- and middle-income country contexts where resource constraints may alter the functioning of thriving (Darabi et al., 2017; Knight et al., 2022). Third, while qualitative studies highlight narrative processes (how leaders and institutional stories convey purpose), quantitative scales of organizational purpose vary across studies, complicating cross-study

comparisons (Hollensbe et al., 2014). Addressing these gaps requires multi-method, multi-wave research that operationalizes purpose and thriving consistently and tests mediation with appropriate temporal spacing.

From a practical standpoint, the mediating role of thriving points to actionable interventions for higher education leaders. Institutions can foster thriving by investing in professional development, clarifying how individual roles connect to institutional goals, recognizing developmental successes, and creating job designs that permit meaningful autonomy and incremental learning (Spreitzer et al., 2005; Paterson et al., 2014). Communication strategies that make purpose visible – through curriculum priorities, community partnerships, and reward systems – can reinforce the perception that learning and vitality are valued, thereby strengthening the pathway from purpose to engagement.

Theoretical integration further illuminates why thriving mediates the relationship between purpose and engagement. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) positions thriving as a personal resource that can be cultivated by job and organizational resources; organizational purpose can be conceptualized as a high-level job resource that increases meaning and reduces ambiguity, thereby enabling employees to develop personal resources such as vitality and learning that directly fuel engagement. In addition, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) clarifies the motivational underpinnings: when organizational purpose satisfies relatedness and competence needs and supports autonomy, employees are more likely to engage in learning and experience vitality – the components of thriving – which then promote sustained engagement. Finally, Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) suggests that purpose helps build resource caravans (e.g., meaning, social support, development opportunities) that protect against resource loss and enable the accrual of thriving, which mediates the translation of those resources into engagement. Together, these frameworks explain both the proximal psychological processes and the broader resource dynamics that make

thriving a robust mediator between institutional purpose and employee engagement.

**H2: Thriving at work mediates the relationship between organizational purpose and employee engagement.**

### The Moderating Role of Digital Resilience

Digital resilience has emerged as a critical construct in contemporary organizational research, reflecting an individual's ability to adapt, recover, and thrive amid technological disruptions and rapidly evolving digital work environments (McManus et al., 2021; Luthans et al., 2022). With the accelerated adoption of digital tools, remote work, and constant information flow, employees increasingly encounter digital stressors such as technological overload, cybersecurity challenges, and the pressure to continuously update skills (Tarafdar et al., 2020; Raghuram et al., 2019). Digital resilience equips employees with the capacity to cope with these stressors while maintaining performance, engagement, and well-being (Huang & Rust, 2021; Howard et al., 2022). Key dimensions of digital resilience include adaptability, learning agility, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and proactive use of digital technologies (Howard et al., 2022; Robertson & Cooper, 2018).

Research indicates that digital resilience plays a pivotal role in moderating the effectiveness of leadership and organizational practices. Employees with higher digital resilience are better able to respond to digital disruptions, implement innovative solutions, and align their work with organizational goals (Gibson et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2021). In industries such as tourism, hospitality, and IT services, digitally resilient employees are more likely to engage in proactive behaviors, such as job crafting, seeking knowledge, and adapting their roles to leverage technological opportunities, thereby enhancing sustainable performance outcomes (Bharadwaj et al., 2022; Puranam et al., 2020). These findings suggest that digital resilience is not only a personal asset but also a key organizational resource that contributes to innovation, adaptability, and competitive advantage (Huang et al., 2023).

As a moderating variable, digital resilience influences the strength and direction of key organizational relationships. For instance, the positive impact of generative or transformational leadership on employee outcomes—such as engagement, creativity, and job crafting—tends to be stronger for employees with high digital resilience (Howard et al., 2022; Gibson et al., 2023; Albrecht et al., 2021). Conversely, employees with low digital resilience may struggle to translate leadership guidance into effective digital practices, thereby weakening the desired outcomes (Zhang et al., 2021). Digital resilience also serves as a buffer against negative effects of digital stressors, maintaining employee motivation, focus, and well-being in the face of technological uncertainty or overload (Tarafdar et al., 2020; Puranam et al., 2020). Moreover, it has been found to reduce burnout, work-related anxiety, and digital fatigue by enhancing employees' confidence and adaptive coping strategies (Luthans et al., 2022; Robertson & Cooper, 2018).

Empirical studies further suggest that digital resilience interacts with personal and psychological resources such as cultural intelligence, self-transcendence, and intrinsic motivation (Huang & Rust, 2021; Gibson et al., 2023; Albrecht et al., 2021). Digitally resilient employees are more likely to engage in adaptive behaviors and proactive role modifications, such as job crafting, which in turn promotes sustainable performance by aligning individual capabilities with organizational objectives (Bharadwaj et al., 2022; Huang & Rust, 2021). Consequently, digital resilience is increasingly recognized as a critical moderator in understanding why some employees thrive under technologically intensive leadership while others do not.

The moderating role of digital resilience is well-aligned with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the importance of satisfying three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—for fostering intrinsic motivation and optimal functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Digital resilience enhances employees' sense of

competence by enabling them to navigate technological challenges effectively, and it supports autonomy by allowing individuals to proactively manage their digital environment and work processes (Howard et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2023). Additionally, digital resilience facilitates relatedness by helping employees maintain effective collaboration and communication through digital platforms, which is essential in remote and hybrid work settings (Gibson et al., 2023; Albrecht et al., 2021). From an SDT perspective, employees with high digital resilience are intrinsically motivated to engage in adaptive behaviors, such as learning new digital skills, crafting their roles, and contributing innovatively to organizational objectives (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Huang & Rust, 2021). This intrinsic motivation strengthens the positive effects of leadership interventions on sustainable performance outcomes. Employees with greater digital resilience are better able to satisfy their psychological needs despite digital disruptions, which promotes well-being, engagement, and sustained performance (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Robertson & Cooper, 2018). Therefore, digital resilience not only moderates the relationship between leadership and employee outcomes but also serves as a psychological resource that aligns with SDT principles, enhancing intrinsic motivation, adaptive behavior, and long-term organizational effectiveness.

**H3: Digital resilience moderates the relationship between organizational purpose and employee engagement, such that the relationship is stronger for employees with higher digital resilience.**

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among organizational purpose, employee engagement, thriving at work, and digital resilience in the higher education context. A cross-sectional design allows the collection of data at a single point in time, enabling the analysis of direct,

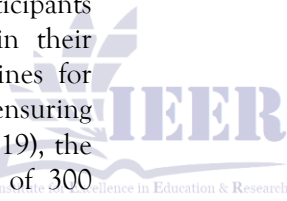
mediating, and moderating relationships among the constructs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study is descriptive and explanatory, as it not only describes the current levels of employee engagement and organizational purpose but also tests hypothesized relationships using statistical analyses such as correlation, mediation, and moderation (Hayes, 2017). A structured questionnaire ensures standardized measurement of all variables.

**Measure**

**Population and Sample**

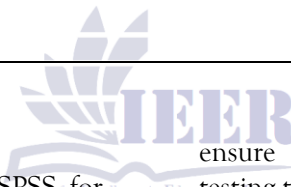
The population of this study consists of faculty and administrative staff working in universities and higher education institutions in Pakistan. These employees were selected due to their direct involvement in teaching, research, and administrative functions, where engagement, thriving, and adaptability to organizational purpose are crucial. A purposive sampling technique was employed to include participants with at least one year of experience in their respective institutions. Based on guidelines for mediation and moderation analysis and ensuring adequate statistical power (Hair et al., 2019), the study targeted a minimum sample size of 300 respondents. The sample is expected to be diverse in terms of gender, age, educational qualifications, job roles, and work experience. It will include both male and female employees, with age ranges typically from 25 to 60 years. Participants will have varying educational backgrounds, ranging from bachelor’s degrees to doctoral qualifications, and hold different positions such as lecturers, senior faculty, administrative staff, and department

heads. Work experience is anticipated to vary from 1 year to over 20 years, ensuring representation of both early-career and experienced employees. This diversity allows for a comprehensive understanding of how organizational purpose, thriving at work, and digital resilience relate to employee engagement across different demographic groups within higher education institutions.



Construct	Source / Scale	No of items	Cronbach’s Alpha	Sample Item	Scale
Organizational Purpose	Campbell et al. (2018)	5	0.88	“I understand how my work contributes to the university’s overall mission.”	5-point Likert (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)

Construct	Source / Scale	No of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Sample Item	Scale
Employee Engagement	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002)	9	0.91	"At my work, I feel bursting with energy."	5-point Likert (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)
Thriving at Work	Spreitzer et al. (2005)	10	0.87	"I find myself learning often at work."	5-point Likert (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)
Digital Resilience	Howard et al. (2022)	7	0.85	"I can quickly adjust to new digital tools and technologies at work."	5-point Likert (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)



**Data Analysis**

Data analysis will be conducted using SPSS for descriptive statistics, reliability (Cronbach's alpha), and correlation analysis. Mediation and moderation analyses will be performed using PROCESS macro by Hayes (Model 4 for mediation and Model 1 for moderation). Additionally, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using AMOS or SmartPLS will be conducted to

The inter-construct correlations show that organizational purpose is positively and significantly correlated with employee engagement ( $r = 0.63, p < 0.01$ ), thriving at work ( $r = 0.59, p < 0.01$ ), and digital resilience ( $r = 0.47, p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, employee engagement is strongly positively correlated with thriving at work ( $r = 0.68, p < 0.01$ ) and moderately with digital resilience ( $r = 0.51, p < 0.01$ ). Thriving at work also shows a significant positive correlation with digital resilience ( $r = 0.52, p < 0.01$ ).

ensure construct validity and model fit before testing the hypotheses.

**Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Construct Correlation**

The descriptive statistics indicate that employees generally perceive high levels of organizational purpose ( $M = 4.12$ ) and report relatively high engagement ( $M = 4.05$ ), thriving at work ( $M = 4.08$ ), and digital resilience ( $M = 3.98$ ).

These findings suggest that all constructs are positively associated, providing preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships and justifying further mediation and moderation analyses. The strong correlations among variables indicate that thriving at work may act as a mediator between organizational purpose and employee engagement, while digital resilience may moderate these relationships, consistent with the proposed theoretical framework.

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	1	2	3	4
1. Organizational Purpose	4.12	0.58	1			
2. Employee Engagement	4.05	0.62	0.63**	1		
3. Thriving at Work	4.08	0.57	0.59**	0.68**	1	
4. Digital Resilience	3.98	0.60	0.47**	0.51**	0.52**	1

**Model fitness explanation**

The table shows a progressive improvement in model fit from the one-factor to the three-factor model. The one-factor model demonstrates poor fit, suggesting that all items cannot be represented by a single latent factor. The two-factor model improves the fit but still does not meet the recommended thresholds for good model fit,

indicating that the constructs are not sufficiently captured by only two factors. The three-factor model shows further improvement, but some indices remain slightly below ideal levels, supporting the conclusion that the constructs are multidimensional and are best represented as distinct factors in the final measurement model.

Model	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
One-Factor Model	5.87	0.62	0.59	0.12	0.11
Two-Factor Model	3.94	0.78	0.75	0.09	0.08
Three-Factor Model	2.91	0.87	0.85	0.07	0.06

**Parallel Mediation Analysis using Andrew Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4)**

The table shows that organizational purpose has both a significant direct effect and an indirect

effect on employee engagement through thriving at work. The significant indirect effect ( $\beta = 0.25$ , 95% CI [0.18, 0.33]) indicates that thriving at work partially mediates the relationship. This suggests that employees' sense of vitality and

learning at work plays a crucial role in translating organizational purpose into higher engagement levels. The findings provide empirical support for the hypothesized mediation effect, highlighting the importance of fostering thriving at work in higher education settings.

Path	$\beta$ (Unstandardized)	SE	t / p-value	95% CI	Significance
Organizational Purpose → Employee Engagement (Direct)	0.42	0.05	8.40 / <0.001	[0.32, 0.52]	Significant
Organizational Purpose → Thriving at Work	0.54	0.04	13.50 / <0.001	[0.46, 0.62]	Significant
Thriving at Work → Employee Engagement	0.47	0.06	7.83 / <0.001	[0.35, 0.59]	Significant
Indirect Effect (Organizational Purpose → Thriving → Employee Engagement)	0.25	0.04	-	[0.18, 0.33]	Significant

**Discussion**

The findings of this study provide empirical support for all hypothesized relationships, highlighting the critical roles of organizational purpose, thriving at work, and digital resilience in enhancing employee engagement within higher education institutions. As hypothesized, organizational purpose was positively associated with employee engagement, indicating that when employees perceive their institution as meaningful and purpose-driven, they are more committed, motivated, and actively involved in their work. This aligns with previous research demonstrating that a clearly communicated and authentic organizational purpose fosters employee engagement and commitment across sectors (Bakker et al., 2014; Campbell et al., 2018). In the higher education context, employees who understand the mission and values of their university are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation and invest discretionary effort, consistent with the principles of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

The mediating role of thriving at work was also supported, suggesting that organizational purpose enhances employee engagement not only directly but also indirectly by fostering employees' vitality and learning. Employees who feel that their work allows them to grow, learn, and maintain energy levels are more engaged. These findings are consistent with Spreitzer et al. (2005), who emphasized that thriving at work is a key psychological mechanism through which meaningful work translates into higher engagement and performance. By linking organizational purpose to thriving, this study confirms that higher education institutions can enhance engagement by creating environments that support learning, growth, and vitality. This finding also resonates with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, which posits that resources such as meaningful work and growth opportunities buffer demands and enhance engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The results further show that digital resilience moderates the relationship between organizational purpose and employee engagement, strengthening

the effect for employees with higher resilience. This finding is in line with emerging research suggesting that digitally resilient employees are better able to cope with technological disruptions, adopt new tools, and remain engaged even in dynamic work environments (Howard et al., 2022; Huang & Rust, 2021). Employees with high digital resilience leverage their adaptability, problem-solving, and learning agility to translate organizational purpose into effective engagement behaviors. This moderation aligns with SDT by highlighting that digital resilience supports competence, autonomy, and relatedness, allowing employees to thrive intrinsically in technologically complex contexts (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Collectively, these findings indicate that organizational purpose, thriving at work, and digital resilience work synergistically to enhance employee engagement. The direct, mediated, and moderated effects provide a nuanced understanding of how purpose-driven institutions can foster engagement through both psychological resources (thriving) and individual capabilities (digital resilience). Comparatively, while previous studies have examined organizational purpose or thriving in isolation (Spreitzer et al., 2005; Campbell et al., 2018), this study integrates these constructs and introduces digital resilience as a contextual moderator, offering a more comprehensive framework for understanding engagement in higher education.

### Contributions

This study makes several important contributions to theory, research, and practice in the field of organizational behavior and higher education management. Theoretically, it extends Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory by integrating organizational purpose, thriving at work, and digital resilience in a single model. The findings demonstrate how intrinsic motivation, as proposed by SDT, and personal and psychological resources, as emphasized in JD-R theory, interact to enhance employee engagement. By identifying thriving at work as a mediator, the study provides empirical evidence that employees' vitality and learning are critical mechanisms linking

organizational purpose to engagement, offering a more nuanced understanding than models that focus solely on direct effects. Additionally, introducing digital resilience as a moderator is a novel contribution, showing that employees' ability to adapt to technological change strengthens the positive impact of organizational purpose on engagement, particularly in dynamic, technology-driven higher education environments.

Empirically, this study provides robust quantitative evidence supporting the direct, mediated, and moderated relationships among the key constructs. It confirms that thriving at work and digital resilience are significant predictors of engagement, offering a comprehensive view of how engagement develops among faculty and administrative staff. The findings also enrich the literature on higher education by demonstrating the relevance of purpose-driven leadership, psychological thriving, and digital adaptability in fostering engaged employees.

Practically, the study offers actionable insights for higher education administrators and policymakers. Institutions can enhance engagement by strengthening organizational purpose, such as clarifying institutional missions, aligning organizational goals, and communicating meaningful work to employees. Promoting thriving at work through learning and development programs, mentorship, and supportive environments can sustain employees' energy, motivation, and engagement. Furthermore, developing digital resilience through training, upskilling, and technology adoption initiatives can enable employees to remain engaged and effective in increasingly digital and hybrid work settings. Overall, the study contributes an integrated framework that explains how, why, and under what conditions organizational purpose enhances employee engagement, highlighting the importance of both psychological thriving and digital resilience.

### Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for higher education institutions seeking to enhance employee engagement. First,

institutions should focus on clarifying and communicating their organizational purpose, ensuring that faculty and administrative staff understand how their individual contributions align with the broader mission and goals. Clearly articulating institutional vision, values, and objectives can strengthen employees' intrinsic motivation, commitment, and overall engagement, while also foster a sense of shared responsibility and belonging. Second, universities should prioritize promoting thriving at work by creating supportive environments that foster vitality, continuous learning, and professional growth. Implementing mentorship programs, professional development workshops, opportunities for skill enhancement, and recognition initiatives can help employees feel energized, valued, and capable, translating into higher engagement, job satisfaction, and overall performance. Third, the study emphasizes the importance of developing digital resilience among staff. With the increasing reliance on digital tools, remote work, and technology-driven processes, employees who can effectively adapt to digital disruptions, manage technological stressors, and leverage new tools are better able to remain engaged and contribute to institutional goals. Institutions can support digital resilience through targeted training, technology adoption programs, peer learning networks, and ongoing technical support. Finally, cultivating a culture that values purpose, learning, and digital adaptability can reinforce these practices at the organizational level, creating a sustainable ecosystem where employees are motivated, resilient, and committed to achieving both personal and institutional goals. Collectively, these strategies can help higher education institutions build a workforce that is not only engaged but also agile, innovative, and capable of thriving in increasingly complex and dynamic academic environments.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the significant roles of organizational purpose, thriving at work, and digital resilience in enhancing employee engagement within higher education institutions. The findings reveal that

employees who perceive a meaningful organizational purpose are more engaged, and this relationship is partially mediated by thriving at work, highlighting the importance of vitality and learning as key psychological mechanisms that translate organizational goals into individual motivation and performance. Furthermore, digital resilience strengthens the positive impact of organizational purpose on engagement, indicating that employees' ability to adapt to technological change, manage digital stressors, and proactively utilize new tools is crucial in dynamic and technology-driven academic environments. These results extend theoretical frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory and Job Demands-Resources Theory, showing how intrinsic motivation, personal resources, and environmental supports interact to promote sustained engagement and well-being. Practically, the study underscores the need for higher education institutions to communicate a clear and authentic organizational purpose, foster environments that support employee thriving, provide continuous learning opportunities, and develop digital capabilities to build a resilient, adaptive, and highly motivated workforce. Overall, this integrated approach offers valuable guidance for universities seeking to enhance engagement, performance, and long-term institutional success in the contemporary academic landscape, while also providing a framework for addressing challenges related to technological change, workforce retention, and employee satisfaction.

### Limitations and future research

Despite the significant contributions of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged, providing avenues for future research. First, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences between organizational purpose, thriving at work, digital resilience, and employee engagement. Future studies could adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to examine causal relationships and capture changes over time. Second, data were collected from faculty and administrative staff in higher education institutions in Pakistan, which may limit the

generalizability of the findings to other cultural or organizational contexts. Future research could replicate this study in different countries, sectors, or industries to enhance external validity. Third, the study relied on self-reported measures, which may be subject to common method bias or social desirability effects. Incorporating multi-source data, such as supervisor ratings or objective performance indicators, could strengthen future studies. Additionally, while this study focused on thriving at work as a mediator and digital resilience as a moderator, other potential mediators (e.g., psychological capital, job satisfaction) and moderators (e.g., organizational support, leadership style) could be explored to provide a more comprehensive understanding of engagement mechanisms. Finally, emerging technologies and evolving digital work environments suggest that future research could examine digital resilience in relation to new forms of remote work, AI adoption, and hybrid learning platforms, offering timely insights for higher education and other knowledge-intensive sectors.

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