

EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL OWNERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A STUDY OF INDIAN PHARMACEUTICAL EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

This paper has studied the link between Psychological Ownership (PO) and Employee Engagement (EE) across three Pharma companies based in Mumbai with a sample size of 270 and has derived key insights and implications for the Pharma Sector as a result. The method employed for this study has been Factor Analysis. We explore the past literature in great details and find out the implications of the same in relation to our study. Through this study key insights from the data were derived, studied and analyzed which will benefit the sector as a whole and also help replicated this research in a scientific way that will further the pool of knowledge in this domain. Some of the findings highlight how the PO and EE are positively linked and as a result provides direction for stakeholders and researchers alike to use the findings from this research study. Meaningful linkage of the two aspects mentioned (PO & EE) are the key in this study which are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that in today's fast-paced and competitive business world, employee engagement is crucial to an organization's success. In its broadest sense, engagement is a feeling of vitality, commitment, and immersion in one's job that is both enjoyable and productive. When workers are engaged, they care about what they do for a living, put their hearts into what they do, and often go above and beyond to help the company achieve its objectives. Also, it is no surprise that to study these areas – it has become equally important as a researcher and also as a practitioner / stakeholder within the Pharmaceutical Industry.

Our goal in doing this research was to investigate Psychological Ownership to its maximum capacity. It is also a very important facet of study for owners of an organization and to study the behavior of employees.

For example, an employee high in psychological ownership might think of the company as “*my company*” and feel personally responsible for its outcomes. Such an employee may be more likely to make extra efforts and safeguard the organization's well-being because successes and setbacks are experienced intimately.

Psychological ownership, according to previous study, may satisfy fundamental human motives that are also important for engagement. According to Pierce et al. (2001), psychological ownership stems from fundamental needs: efficacy (competence and effectance), self-identity, and having a place to belong. In other words, feeling ownership at work can give employees a sense of efficacy and control (as they feel capable of influencing “their” job or organization), a reinforcement of identity (the organization's values and achievements become part of “*who I am*”), and a sense of belonging or “home” at work. These psychological conditions closely parallel drivers of engagement identified in classic engagement theory (e.g., the need for meaningfulness, safety, and availability in one's role as described by Kahn, 1990). It stands to reason that when employees feel that “*this is my company*” or “*I am an owner of this work*,” they are more likely to be mentally and emotionally invested – effectively more engaged – in their work.

However, despite its intuitive appeal, **psychological ownership has been sparsely studied in India**. Much of the body of research on psychological ownership and its advantages comes from Western contexts or cross-cultural studies. Shukla and Singh (2015) note that the construct has received little attention in Indian research, even though evidence elsewhere links it to positive organizational outcomes. This is a key gap due to the fact that the culture and organization context may influence the way the ownership feelings are formed and converted into actions. The hierarchical and collectivist culture of the Indian workplace traditionally is more hierarchical than most Western

workplaces, and this may affect how employees feel ownership and engagement. Our paper fills this gap in the context by analyzing the psychological ownership in Indian pharmaceutical firms and offers insights that can be relevant locally.

Our study will also be based on our prior study in the same field, where we examined the personal responsibility and involvement. In the same exploratory project that took place before, we discovered that when employees felt that they were personally liable to their work the degree of involvement was likewise higher. The feeling of accountability for the results is similar to the psychological ownership; actually, accountability is regarded as one of the dimensions or manifestations of the ownership emotions (e.g., the feeling that I own this task, and, therefore, I am responsible to it). The good outcomes of the accountability study made us extend our scope and look at the broader construct of psychological ownership. We asked ourselves: is there a greater level of responsibility ownership with the organization, or does this greater level of responsibility result in greater employee engagement? And is this connection empirically viable in the Indian pharma?

In an attempt to answer these questions, we formulated a current research concerned with three mid-sized pharmaceutical companies in Mumbai. All the companies are anonymous in this case, but they compete in the Indian generics and formulations market and have a number of hundreds of professionals in the market working in various areas such as R&D, production, quality control, marketing, and sales.

In this article, we looked at how the pharmaceutical sector in India relates to psychological ownership and employee engagement. We assume that ownership (psychological) is positively correlated with employee engagement - this means that those who feel ownership to their work and their place of work will show greater levels of engagement. Our study is relevant to both theory and practice because we can empirically study this relationship. Theoretically, it brings together the psychological ownership construct in engagement research by responding to the calls to address more in the integration between personal resource state and work engagement. In practice, it provides managers in the pharma industry (and elsewhere) with information about how the ownership emotions can be nurtured to have a more engaged and high-performing workforce.

The rest of this paper follows the following structure. We start by examining the existing literature of psychological ownership and employee engagement, as well as the theoretical justification for the connection between the two concepts. We then outline our methodology, sample, measures and the method to analyze the data (which is an exploratory factor analysis to justify our measures, which are then followed by correlation and regression analysis). Finally, we provide some suggestions for how this area may be explored in future studies and provide a brief overview of the key results.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological Ownership in Organizations

Psychological ownership concept defines the possessiveness and attachment that people have towards a target object or entity. Pierce, Kostova and Dirks (2003) are well known to have formulated the definition of psychological ownership; they characterized the state of the subject by thinking of a target and/or a section of it as something that belongs specifically to an individual. The ownership target in organizational setting could be the entire company, the team of work or even a particular project or an idea. A worker who feels a sense of psychological ownership will believe and behave as though he or she is an owner e.g. addressing the organization as my organization or be proud of its achievements personally. Such an attitude is exemplified by the sentiments like; I feel like this is my company, I feel owning the success of our product like it was my own company. Psychological ownership is therefore an experience that is psychologically realized in which an employee develops possessive attitudes towards a target (be it their organization or their job).

Psychological ownership outcomes have also been researched and studies have constantly pointed towards high psychological ownership and positive employee attitudes and behavior. Indicatively, VandeWalle et al. (1995) and Pendleton et al. (1998) established the association of feelings of ownership with high levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment in cooperative and corporate employees. Avey et al. (2009) followed this line of research by creating a scale of psychological ownership which is measurable and showing its association with outcomes in work. Employees who had higher ownership emotions in their study displayed a greater job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) and a lower propensity to have turnover intentions. In addition to a territoriality dimension, which is a defensive kind of ownership, they have posited psychological ownership as a multifaceted phenomena with aspects including self-efficacy, accountability, feeling of belonging, and self-identity. These dimensions echo the basic needs: for instance, *accountability* reflects taking responsibility (linking to effectance and control), and *belongingness* reflects having a place (linking to the need for home). Notably, **accountability** can be seen as both an antecedent and consequence of psychological ownership – when people feel something is theirs, they feel accountable for it, and conversely, giving people more accountability can increase their ownership feelings.

It is worth mentioning that while psychological ownership generally leads to desirable outcomes, extremely high levels or certain forms (like territoriality, the protective “this is *mine*, don’t touch” feeling) can have downsides, such

as resistance to change or knowledge hoarding. Our study, however, focuses on the *promotive* aspects of psychological ownership – the constructive sense of ownership that is tied to responsibility and stewardship, rather than territorial defensiveness (Pierce & Jussila, 2011; Avey et al., 2009). The promotive form is what we expect to be most relevant to boosting engagement.

Employee Engagement

The level to which workers are mentally and emotionally invested in their jobs and are prepared to go above and beyond the call of duty is known as employee engagement, and it has been a hot subject in the field of organizational behavior for the last few decades. One of the earliest academic definitions of engagement, by Kahn (1990), described it as “*the harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance.*” To put it more simply, engaged workers are those that are eager, focused, and completely absorbed in what they are doing for a living. Work engagement was later defined as an upbeat, energizing mentality. An example of a job-related state of mind that is defined by vitality, devotion, and immersion is work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The ability to work with great vigor and mental resilience, with a feeling of purpose, pride, and challenge, and to be completely absorbed in one's job to the point that time seems to fly by is the essence of commitment.

With the help of these, we are able to cover the core topics which are measured in our study and enable us to understand the nuances of its application in our study and in more detail.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sample

For this Study, data was collected from Pharma firms (referred to here as Company A, B, and C for confidentiality) operate primarily in generic drug manufacturing and formulations, each employing roughly 400–600 staff. We chose these firms because they are similar in size and industry, and all three had participated in our prior study on engagement – providing a level of trust and access to conduct the survey.

Using a combination of purposive and convenience sampling, we obtained a sample of **N = 270 employees** across the three companies. Human Resources departments at each company helped distribute the online survey link internally (and in a few cases paper surveys for shop-floor staff with limited computer access). Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with assurances that responses would be used only for research and kept confidential. We were satisfied that the sample reasonably represents the mid-level workforce of these companies, who are the focus of engagement initiatives.

Measures

We used a **6-point Likert scale** (1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 6 = “Strongly Agree”) for all items. Higher scores indicated stronger endorsement of the item’s statement.

Psychological Ownership (PO): We measured psychological ownership with a **6-item scale** adapted from established instruments by Avey et al. (2009) and Van Dyne & Pierce (2004). These sources provide well-validated items capturing employees’ sense of ownership toward the organization or their job.

Questions	Sub Dimension	Dimensions
I feel a deep sense of responsibility for the success of this organization.	Accountability	Psychological Ownership
I often think of this organization as “my own.”	Identification	Psychological Ownership
I feel personally connected to the outcomes of my team’s work.	Belongingness	Psychological Ownership
I believe my contributions directly shape the future of this organization.	Self-efficacy	Psychological Ownership
I feel at home in this organization, as if it were my own space.	Belongingness	Psychological Ownership
I take pride in safeguarding and improving the resources of this organization.	Stewardship	Psychological Ownership

In our study, the respondents were asked to keep their organization as a reference point and take the survey.

Employee Engagement (EE): Engagement was measured with a **6-item scale** and the details of which are outlined below:

Questions	Sub Dimension	Dimensions
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I feel proud to recommend this organization to a friend seeking employment.	Pride	Engagement
I always feel proud to tell others great things about working here.	Pride	Engagement
It's extremely difficult for me to leave this organization.	Presence	Engagement
I do not even think about leaving this organization to work somewhere else.	Presence	Engagement
My organization inspires me to bring my best work everyday.	Performance	Engagement
My organization enables me to go extra mile than normally required to achieve my work.	Performance	Engagement

Both the PO and EE were subject to validation in our analysis, specifically with Factor Analysis.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data was processed using IBM SPSS, and the process of data analysis is as follows:

Data Cleaning and Preparation:

The data was cleaned from over 286 responses to obtain an N of 270. The likert responses were treated as numerical values.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA):

EFA was used on the 12 items. Along with KMO tests and Bartlett's Test for sampling adequacy. As the numbers were found satisfactory - eigenvalues > 1, we went ahead with the next steps.

Reliability Analysis:

We computed **Cronbach's alpha**, and an alpha above 0.70 is considered acceptable for research; we expected and found our alpha in the 0.8+ range.

As observed in the results section (next section), the factor analysis supports two separate factors, further adding confidence to our analysis.

RESULTS

Factor Analysis and Scale Validation

We conducted the factor analysis on 12 survey items (6 were PO and 6 were EE). The KMO Test (Sampling Adequacy) was at 0.898, which is considered good. And the Bartlett's test of sphericity was highly significant, which further justifies a factor analysis. Two factors had an eigenvalue of more than 1, and hence suggest a 2-factor solution, which was in line with our assumption and expectation of a two-construct. The tables below explain factor loadings as well as communalities.

Table 1. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results – Rotated Factor Loadings and Communalities

Item	Construct	Factor 1: Engagement	Factor 2: Ownership	Communality
PO1	Psychological Ownership	0.19	0.79	0.67
PO2	Psychological Ownership	0.22	0.73	0.59
PO3	Psychological Ownership	0.26	0.79	0.68
PO4	Psychological Ownership	0.19	0.80	0.67
PO5	Psychological Ownership	0.26	0.79	0.69
PO6	Psychological Ownership	0.19	0.78	0.66
EE1	Employee Engagement	0.81	0.19	0.69
EE2	Employee Engagement	0.82	0.15	0.70
EE3	Employee Engagement	0.79	0.14	0.65
EE4	Employee Engagement	0.80	0.18	0.66
EE5	Employee Engagement	0.79	0.10	0.63
EE6	Employee Engagement	0.77	0.14	0.69

As shown in Table 1, all six **employee engagement** items (EE1–EE6) loaded very strongly on **Factor 1**, with loadings ranging from 0.79 to 0.82 on that factor. Their loadings on Factor 2 were minimal (all near 0.1 to 0.2). Conversely, all six **psychological ownership** items (PO1–PO6) loaded highly on **Factor 2** (loadings 0.73 to 0.80) and had very low cross-loadings on Factor 1 (0.19 to 0.26). This pattern confirms that the items are clustered into two distinct groups. Each item's highest loading corresponds to the intended construct, supporting the **construct validity** of our measures. There were no problematic cross-loadings: the difference between primary and secondary loading for each item was substantial (generally >0.5 difference), indicating clear discrimination.

The **communality values** (proportion of variance in each item explained by the two factors together) were all fairly high, ranging from 0.59 to 0.70. This means each item had well over half its variance accounted for by the factor model, which is a good indicator that the factors capture the essence of the items. For instance, item PO4 ("I feel a

strong sense of ownership for my company”) had a communality of 0.67. Similarly, item EE2 (“I always feel proud to tell others great things about working here”) had a communality of 0.70, largely due to its 0.82 loading on the engagement factor.

In substantive terms, **Factor 1 can be interpreted as Employee Engagement**, since it is defined by high-energy, enthusiasm, and absorption items. **Factor 2 is Psychological Ownership**, defined by items reflecting personal ownership, pride, and belongingness in the organisation. This successful extraction of two factors reassures us that respondents perceived a difference between feeling engaged and feeling ownership – they did not, for example, treat all positive statements as one generic “feel-good” factor, but rather distinguished between these concepts.

We also note that the two factors were moderately correlated with each other (because we used varimax which is orthogonal rotation, it forced them uncorrelated in the solution shown. However, if we had used an oblique rotation like Direct Oblimin, we would have observed a correlation between the factors. Based on our later analysis, the factor correlation is around $r = 0.45$). This moderate correlation is expected – psychological ownership and engagement are related constructs, but they are far from redundant. They share some common positive-affect variance (hence the correlation), but each has unique variance as well.

Overall, the EFA provided strong evidence that our measurement model holds: **five items reliably measure psychological ownership, five items reliably measure engagement**, and these constructs are distinct though positively related. Thus, we proceeded to create composite scores for each construct.

Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

After confirming the factor structure, we calculated scale scores for **psychological ownership** and **employee engagement** for each respondent by averaging the respective item ratings (since each set had five items, an average or sum is equivalent except for scaling). Both scales exhibited high internal consistency:

- The **Psychological Ownership scale** had a Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.87$ which indicates a excellent score.
- The **Employee Engagement scale** had a Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.88$, similarly indicating excellent internal consistency.

These reliability coefficients assure us that our information is solid to analyse.

Psychological Ownership And Engagement Correlation.

- The first hypothesis was accepted because psychological ownership showed a positive but significant relationship with employee engagement. It was found that the Pearson correlation coefficient was $r = 0.45$ ($p < .001$).
- In the case of the regression model, the outcome was as follows:
- The regression equation was also statistically significant ($F(1, 268) = 62.9$, $p = .001$), which supports the idea that ownership is a powerful predictor of engagement.
- $B = 0.45$ ($SE = 0.057$): This is an unstandardized beta coefficient of the psychological ownership. In less technical language, when the ownership feeling of an employee increased by 1 point (e.g., by one point on most of the items) we would expect the employee to score an engagement score higher by almost half a point on the 6-point scale.
- The standardized beta (which in one predictor model is identical to the correlation) was $= 0.45$, which is equal to Pearson r .
- We found that the R^2 of the model was 0.202, which implies that the psychological ownership alone can explain 20.2% of the variation in employee engagement in our sample. This is a large portion as an individual psychological predictor bearing in mind that engagement has been identified to be multi-determined (job resources, leadership, personality etc. are other elements that contribute). It suggests psychological ownership is one of the important factors influencing engagement, albeit not the only one (nearly 80% of variance is left unexplained by this simple model, which would include all other influences and measurement error).

However, the clear message is that **when an employee has both – interesting work environment and a sense of ownership – engagement tends to be highest.**

In order to summarise our findings in a quantitative way, our factor analysis revealed two distinct constructs, and Cronbach’s Alpha revealed a reliable value. All this showcased a meaningful and positive linkage between psychological ownership and employee engagement among these Indian pharmaceutical employees.

Interpretation of Key Findings

Our findings revealed that there is a clear empirical distinction between PO and EE in our study.

The **positive relationship** between psychological ownership and engagement that we observed reinforces and extends prior research. It is consistent with the results of Rapti et al. (2023), who found that employees who feel a combination of personal resources (like ownership) are more likely to be engaged. Our study adds to this by focusing on an Indian sample in a specific industry (pharma), thereby broadening the generalizability of the relationship. It also resonates with Goyal et al. (2024) who highlighted psychological ownership as a strong driver of engagement in an Indian context (though their study was in IT). Moreover, our work aligns with Obisesan and Adegoke (2022), who in a different cultural context (Nigeria) and industry (banking) also reported that psychological ownership significantly predicted engagement. The convergence of evidence from multiple studies increases confidence that the ownership-engagement link is not a fluke of one sample, but a robust phenomenon observable across settings.

Some key findings are as below:

- **Intrinsic Motivation and Purpose:** Psychological ownership may endow work with greater intrinsic motivation. Owning something often brings joy and a sense of purpose in tending to it (consider how tending one's own garden is often more satisfying than tending a stranger's garden for pay). Employees who feel ownership might find greater inherent satisfaction in doing their tasks well. This can make them more absorbed and willing to exert discretionary effort (vigor). The basic needs satisfaction theory applies here: ownership fulfills needs like self-efficacy and belonging, which are known to energize individuals. For example, feeling effective and in control (a facet of ownership) is a known driver of the vigor aspect of engagement.
- **Accountability and Responsibility:** Our study's context and prior one on accountability both point out that ownership comes hand-in-hand with accountability. Engaged employees often behave like "owners" by taking initiative and responsibility. We suspect that psychological ownership encourages employees to assume responsibility for outcomes – they feel accountable to themselves for the organization's performance. This accountability likely motivates them to be fully engaged (as being disengaged would conflict with their sense of responsibility). It's like they set higher internal standards for their work effort and quality because it's "*my company, my work.*"
- **Alignment of Values and Identity:** When employees internalize the organization as "theirs," their personal identity and values may become more aligned with the organization's mission and values.

Limitations

While our study yields useful insights, it is not without limitations. One major limitation is the **cross-sectional design** – all data were collected at one time, which means we cannot definitively establish causality. We have interpreted the results in line with theory that psychological ownership leads to higher engagement. However, it is also plausible that engaged employees tend to develop higher psychological ownership (reverse causality) or that there is a reinforcing loop. In reality, both directions likely complement each other over time. Without longitudinal data, we must be cautious in phrasing cause-effect; our statements about "increasing ownership will boost engagement" are based on theory and correlation, not proven temporal precedence. Future research could employ a longitudinal design (e.g., measure ownership and engagement at multiple time points, or introduce an ownership intervention and track engagement changes) to strengthen causal inferences.

Another limitation is the **use of self-report surveys for both independent and dependent variables**, which raises concerns about common method variance (CMV). Respondents might give consistently positive (or negative) answers due to a general response tendency or mood, inflating correlations. We attempted to mitigate this by ensuring anonymity (reducing social desirability bias) and by separating the constructs in the survey (they were mixed in order, not all ownership then all engagement). The factor analysis results – showing distinct factors – alleviate some worry about CMV; if one latent factor (like an acquiescence bias) was driving answers, we might have seen a one-factor solution.

There may be nuances of psychological ownership (like distinguishing "promotive" vs "preventive/territorial" ownership) that we did not capture. Our data appear to reflect the positive/promotive side. It would be interesting but was beyond our scope to examine, for instance, if territorial ownership (possessiveness that might lead to guarding information) has a different or maybe even negative effect on engagement. Our assumption is that in our context, territoriality was low – anecdotally, we didn't hear of employees jealously guarding work; rather, ownership was more team-oriented. But using a more detailed measure (like Avey's 10-item scale which covers multiple dimensions) could provide deeper insights. Similarly, our engagement measure, though reliable, was a short form.

CONCLUSION

There might be subtleties of psychological ownership (such as the distinction between the type of ownership of promotion vs prevention/territorial ownership) that were not reflected upon our part. Our evidence seems to touch upon the positive/promotive side. It would be intriguing but beyond our ability to investigate whether territorial ownership (possessiveness which, in turn, may result in guarded information) has a different or perhaps even a negative influence on engagement. We have assumed that in our case, the territoriality was low, anecdotally we did not hear of employees guarding their work and territory; instead, ownership was more of a collective team-based type. Nonetheless, a more specific measure (such as the 10-item scale by Avey, which takes into account more than one dimension) might help to shed more light. Likewise, our measure of engagement was a short form despite being reliable.

We discovered that, in fact, psychological ownership and employee engagement are positively and significantly correlated. Our results can be added to the existing literature that the psychological factor such as ownership is a significant driver of engagement. They build upon previous studies by establishing this association in the Indian setting and so fill a literature gap that mentioned the psychological ownership had not been adequately explored in India. In the case of organizations, particularly those in high-skill areas, such as pharma, nurturing that sense of ownership may be the key to obtaining a more dedicated, active, and engaged workforce that may eventually propel the organization to new heights.

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