

Understanding Employee Motivation in Public Healthcare: The Role of Training and Work Engagement

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Abstract

Motivating healthcare workers, especially nurses in the government sector, is essential for maintaining high-quality patient care. This study examines how training impacts the motivation of government nursing officers at Teaching Hospital Peradeniya in Sri Lanka. Using a structured questionnaire and responses from 300 nurses, the findings reveal a strong positive relationship between training and motivation. Nurses who received relevant and effective training reported higher levels of confidence, job satisfaction, and willingness to perform. The findings further indicate that work engagement partially mediates the relationship between training and motivation, suggesting that training enhances motivation both directly and indirectly through increased employee engagement. The results suggest that training not only improves technical skills but also boosts psychological readiness and professional morale. In the challenging environment of public hospitals, where resources are often limited, targeted training emerges as a key strategy to enhance motivation and performance. The study highlights the importance of designing practical and role-specific training programmes to support nursing staff and strengthen the public healthcare system. These insights are particularly relevant for hospital administrators and policymakers aiming to build a more committed and capable nursing workforce.

Keywords: *Employee Motivation, Government Nurses, Nursing Workforce, Professional Development, Public Healthcare, Sri Lanka, Training, Work Engagement*

Introduction

Training and employee motivation are two key areas in Human Resource Management (HRM), especially in sectors like healthcare where service quality depends directly on human performance. In nursing, motivation is essential to maintain patient care standards and manage job demands (Toode, Routasalo, & Suominen, 2011). However, in Sri Lanka's public hospitals, there are growing concerns about nurses' motivation despite the security and benefits provided by government employment. Teaching Hospital Peradeniya (THP) is a major tertiary care institution in Sri Lanka that employs nearly 600 nursing officers. Nurses in this setting are responsible for handling a wide range of tasks, often under stressful and resource-limited conditions. These pressures may lead to lower motivation levels, which can negatively affect the quality of healthcare delivery (Moody & Pesut, 2006).

Motivation refers to the internal drive or willingness to exert effort toward organisational goals (Robbins & Judge, 2010). It is influenced by factors such as working conditions, rewards, leadership, and training. Among these, training plays a critical role by improving knowledge and skills, boosting confidence, and making employees feel more competent and valued (Janssen et al., 1999). Alongside training, work engagement is an emerging concept linked to motivation. It is defined as a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that includes vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Research shows that employees who are more engaged in their work tend to be more motivated, productive, and committed (Keyko et al., 2016). Therefore, it is important to study not only the direct impact of training on motivation but also the role of work engagement in this relationship. In the Sri Lankan context, especially in the government health sector, limited research has explored how training and engagement together influence motivation. Most existing studies have focused on developed countries or on general employees, ignoring the specific challenges faced by nursing staff.

Although previous studies have established positive relationships between training, work engagement, and employee motivation, limited empirical evidence exists within Sri Lankan public healthcare institutions. Most

prior studies have been conducted in developed countries or private-sector organisations, creating uncertainty regarding whether similar relationships exist among government nursing officers working in resource-constrained public hospitals. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to understanding the mediating role of work engagement in explaining how training contributes to employee motivation within the Sri Lankan healthcare sector. Therefore, this study addresses this empirical gap by examining the impact of training on employee motivation and the mediating role of work engagement among government nursing officers at Teaching Hospital Peradeniya.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature and develops the hypotheses. Section 3 presents the conceptual framework. Section 4 explains the methodology. Section 5 presents the findings, followed by the discussion in Section 6. Finally, Section 7 concludes the study and presents recommendations, limitations, and future research directions.

Literature Review

Motivation

Motivation refers to the internal drive that encourages individuals to act towards achieving personal or organisational goals. It is a key factor in workplace performance and satisfaction (Robbins & Judge, 2010). Several theories explain employee motivation, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and Self-Determination Theory. In the nursing context, motivation is closely linked to how nurses feel about their work, the level of recognition they receive, and their opportunities for development (Moody & Pesut, 2006). When nurses are motivated, they show more commitment, better performance, and stronger patient care outcomes (Awosusi & Jegede, 2011). Motivated nurses are also more likely to remain in their roles, reducing turnover and improving healthcare quality (Yildiz et al., 2009). In contrast, low motivation can lead to absenteeism, burnout, and emotional exhaustion (Tummers et al., 2006).

Work Engagement

Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Engaged employees are more energetic, committed, and enthusiastic about their work. In the healthcare sector, high levels of engagement are associated with better patient care, reduced errors, and higher job satisfaction (Keyko et al., 2016). Research shows that when nurses are engaged in their work, they are more likely to be motivated, collaborate effectively with colleagues, and cope with job demands (Bakker et al., 2008). Engagement acts as a psychological buffer, helping individuals manage workplace stress and maintain performance (Saks, 2006).

Training

Training is one of the most effective tools for improving employee skills and motivation. It includes formal and informal learning activities aimed at enhancing knowledge, competencies, and job performance (Noe, 2010). In nursing, training helps employees stay updated with clinical skills, use new technologies, and meet evolving patient needs. Studies have shown that nurses who receive regular training report higher job satisfaction and motivation (Janssen et al., 1999). Training also strengthens nurses' confidence, encourages continuous learning, and supports career development (De Cooman et al., 2008).

Relationship between Training and Motivation

There is strong evidence that training has a positive impact on employee motivation. Well-designed training programmes increase knowledge, clarify job roles, and create a sense of achievement, all of which enhance intrinsic motivation (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Nurses who receive training feel more prepared and supported,

which boosts their motivation to perform (Galletta et al., 2011). In Sri Lanka, where government nurses face heavy workloads and resource shortages, access to training can be a key factor in maintaining morale and performance (Pathirage & Jayawardena, 2011). Training that addresses practical needs and professional growth contributes directly to higher motivation levels.

Relationship between Work Engagement and Motivation

Work engagement and motivation are closely connected. Engaged employees are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation, which drives long-term performance and satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In healthcare, engaged nurses report lower stress, better teamwork, and a stronger sense of purpose (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Engagement helps transform the effects of external rewards (such as salary or training) into internalised motivation. This is especially important in emotionally demanding professions like nursing, where internal motivation sustains high-quality care (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Relationship between Training and Work Engagement

Training not only improves job skills but also enhances engagement by making employees feel valued and supported (Saks, 2006). Training opportunities demonstrate that the organisation is investing in employee development, which increases emotional attachment and work dedication (Salanova et al., 2005). In nursing, training helps staff adapt to changes, feel competent in new practices, and build resilience. This leads to higher engagement and, indirectly, improved motivation and patient outcomes (Keyko et al., 2016).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that training is an important organisational resource that contributes positively to employee motivation and work engagement. Previous studies have consistently reported that employees who receive relevant training opportunities are more likely to develop the knowledge, confidence, and commitment required to perform effectively. Similarly, work engagement has been identified as an important psychological state that enhances motivation and job performance. Although these relationships have been widely examined in international settings, limited empirical evidence exists within Sri Lankan public healthcare institutions, particularly among government nursing officers. Therefore, further investigation is needed to understand whether work engagement serves as a mechanism through which training influences employee motivation in the Sri Lankan public healthcare context. This gap provides the foundation for the present study and the development of the proposed hypotheses.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

This study aims to examine how training influences the motivation of government nursing officers and to what extent work engagement mediates this relationship. The theoretical base for this model is Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which proposes that individuals are more motivated when their needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are fulfilled. In this framework, training serves as an enabler that enhances employees' skills and confidence. This not only leads to greater competence but also improves their emotional connection to work. Work engagement, defined as a state of vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), acts as the mediator translating training benefits into lasting motivation.

The conceptual model includes:

- Training as the independent variable (predictor)
- Work engagement as the mediating variable
- Employee motivation as the dependent variable (outcome)

The relationships among these variables are illustrated in figure 1.

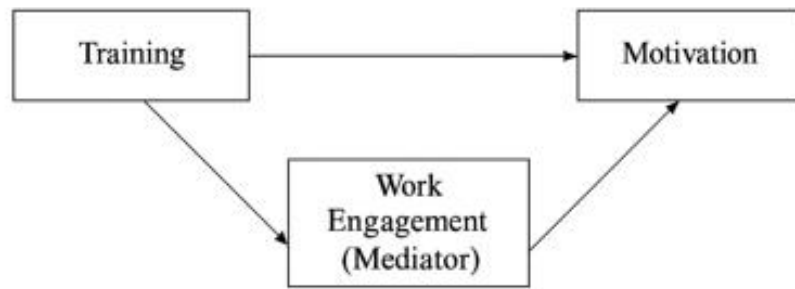


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Developed by author based on Ryan and Deci (2000), Saks (2006), and Schaufeli and Bakker (2003).

Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the above model and supporting literature, the following hypotheses were developed:

- **H₁:** Training has a significant positive impact on the motivation of government nursing officers.
- **H₂:** Training has a significant positive impact on the work engagement of nursing officers.
- **H₃:** Work engagement has a significant positive impact on the motivation of nursing officers.
- **H₄:** Work engagement mediates the relationship between training and motivation.

Together, this conceptual framework and set of hypotheses provide a clear foundation for examining the mechanisms through which training enhances employee motivation in the healthcare context. By incorporating work engagement as a mediating factor, the study recognises the psychological processes that link skill development to motivational outcomes. This framework will guide the empirical analysis and help uncover both the direct and indirect effects of training interventions on motivation among government nursing officers in Sri Lanka.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to examine the impact of training on employee motivation, with work engagement as a mediator. A deductive research strategy was followed, guided by the conceptual framework and established hypotheses. The study was cross-sectional in nature, using a structured questionnaire to collect data at a single point in time.

Population and Sample

The target population included government nursing officers working at Teaching Hospital Peradeniya, a leading tertiary care hospital in Sri Lanka. Teaching Hospital Peradeniya was selected because it is one of the largest tertiary-care hospitals in Sri Lanka, serving a substantial patient population and employing a large number of nursing officers across various clinical units. This provides an appropriate context for examining training, work engagement, and motivation within a public healthcare setting.

The nursing officers included in the study represented a range of hospital units, including medical wards, surgical wards, intensive care units, outpatient departments, and specialised care units. This diversity enabled the study to capture experiences from different nursing environments.

The total nursing staff at the hospital was around 600. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size table, a sample of 300 nurses was selected for the study. A simple random sampling technique was employed using the nursing staff registry maintained by the hospital administration. Each nursing officer was assigned a unique identification number, and respondents were selected using a random selection procedure until the required sample size of 300 was obtained. The unit of analysis was the individual nursing officer.

Data Collection Method

Primary data were collected using a self-administered structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed in printed form to all selected respondents during their shift changes or scheduled breaks. Ethical clearance and official approval were obtained prior to data collection. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

To minimise potential response bias arising from workload pressures and shift responsibilities, questionnaires were distributed during shift transitions and scheduled break periods. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and participation was entirely voluntary. These measures helped reduce social desirability bias and encouraged honest responses.

Measurement of Variables

The study consisted of three main constructs: training (independent variable), motivation (dependent variable), and work engagement (mediator). Each construct was measured using validated scales adopted from previous research. Training was measured using items adapted from Saks (2006) and Noe (2010). Work engagement was assessed using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002), covering vigour, dedication, and absorption. Motivation was measured using the Work Motivation Scale adapted from Mbindyo et al. (2009), covering intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. All responses were captured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Validity and Reliability

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by academic experts and hospital administrators. A pilot test was conducted with 30 nurses, and minor adjustments were made based on their feedback. Reliability of each scale was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, where a threshold value of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable. The results confirmed that all measurement scales had high internal consistency.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analysed using SPSS (Version 23) following a systematic procedure. First, descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to summarise the characteristics of the main variables. Then, reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. To examine the strength and direction of the relationships between variables, correlation analysis was performed. Multiple regression analysis was applied to test the direct relationships proposed in hypotheses H₁ to H₃. Finally, mediation analysis was carried out using the Baron and Kenny (1986) approach along with the Sobel test, in order to evaluate the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between training and motivation (H₄).

Data Analysis and Results

This section presents the statistical findings of the study based on responses from 300 government nursing officers at Teaching Hospital Peradeniya. The objective was to test the research hypotheses and evaluate the relationships

between training, work engagement, and motivation. Data were analysed using SPSS (Version 23), and results are shown under descriptive statistics, reliability, correlation, regression, and mediation analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the central tendency and variability of the key variables. The results are shown below:

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Training	3.47	0.68
Work Engagement	3.56	0.72
Motivation	3.51	0.64

The table indicates that all three variables- training, work engagement, and motivation had mean scores above the midpoint (3.00) on the five-point Likert scale, suggesting that the respondents generally agreed that they experienced adequate training, felt engaged in their work, and were motivated. The mean for work engagement (M = 3.56) was slightly higher than for training (M = 3.47) and motivation (M = 3.51), indicating that most nurses felt energetically involved and psychologically committed to their work. The standard deviations, ranging from 0.64 to 0.72, show moderate variability, suggesting a reasonable spread of opinions without extreme outliers.

Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. The reliability scores are considered acceptable if $\alpha > 0.70$.

- Training: Cronbach's Alpha = 0.81
- Work Engagement: Cronbach's Alpha = 0.84
- Motivation: Cronbach's Alpha = 0.79

All values exceeded the minimum threshold, confirming that the questionnaire items measuring each construct were consistent and reliable. This ensures that the responses accurately reflect each participant's perception of training, engagement, and motivation, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings.

Correlation Analysis

To examine the relationships among the main variables, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. These values show how strongly two variables are related.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

	Training	Work Engagement	Motivation
Training	1.000	0.701**	0.684**
Work Engagement	0.701**	1.000	0.729**
Motivation	0.684**	0.729**	1.000

Note: $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

The correlation results reveal statistically significant and strong positive relationships between all variables. Training showed a strong correlation with work engagement ($r = 0.701$, $p < 0.01$) and motivation ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that as training increases, so does engagement and motivation. Similarly, work engagement had

a strong positive relationship with motivation ($r = 0.729$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that more engaged employees tend to be more motivated. These findings confirm the initial assumption that the variables move together in a meaningful way and support further testing through regression.

Regression Analysis

To examine the direct effects proposed in hypotheses H₁ to H₃, multiple regression analysis was conducted. This allowed for understanding how each independent variable predicted the dependent variable.

Table 3: Regression Results

Hypothesis	Standardised Beta (β)	Significance (p-value)
H ₁ : Training $\rightarrow$ Motivation	0.64	< 0.001
H ₂ : Training $\rightarrow$ Work Engagement	0.68	< 0.001
H ₃ : Work Engagement $\rightarrow$ Motivation	0.71	< 0.001

All three hypotheses were supported by statistically significant regression results. The beta coefficient for training predicting motivation ($\beta = 0.64$) indicates a strong positive influence, meaning that better training leads to higher motivation. Training also had a significant effect on work engagement ($\beta = 0.68$), suggesting that well-trained nurses feel more involved and connected to their roles. Finally, work engagement was a strong predictor of motivation ($\beta = 0.71$), further supporting the idea that psychological involvement at work enhances overall motivation. These results establish that both training and engagement are key contributors to motivational outcomes in the nursing context.

Mediation Analysis

To test Hypothesis H₄, which proposed that work engagement mediates the relationship between training and motivation, a mediation analysis was performed using the Baron and Kenny (1986) method and the Sobel test.

Table 4: Mediation Analysis Results

Path	Standardised Beta (β)	Sobel Test (Z)	p-value
Training $\rightarrow$ Motivation (direct)	0.38	–	–
Training $\rightarrow$ Work Engagement	0.68	–	–
Work Engagement $\rightarrow$ Motivation	0.71	4.12	< 0.001

The results reveal a partial mediation effect. Initially, the direct effect of training on motivation was $\beta = 0.64$. However, when work engagement was added to the model, the direct effect dropped to $\beta = 0.38$. This reduction indicates that part of the effect of training on motivation operates through engagement. The Sobel test further confirmed the statistical significance of this mediation effect ($Z = 4.12$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, Hypothesis H₄ is supported, and it can be concluded that work engagement serves as a significant pathway through which training enhances motivation.

This mediation finding is critical, as it highlights the psychological process linking training efforts to motivational outcomes. It suggests that even when employees are trained, the motivational benefit may not fully materialise unless they are also actively engaged in their work. Thus, organisations must consider strategies that enhance both skill development and emotional involvement.

The results further indicate that the mediation is partial rather than full, as training continued to demonstrate a significant direct effect on motivation even after work engagement was included in the model. This suggests that training influences employee motivation through multiple pathways, including enhanced competence, confidence, and perceptions of organisational support, in addition to its indirect effect through work engagement.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how training affects employee motivation among government nursing officers, and whether this relationship is mediated by work engagement. Based on the findings from the regression and mediation analyses, all four hypotheses were supported, indicating strong theoretical and practical implications.

The first hypothesis (H_1) proposed that training has a significant positive effect on motivation. This was supported by the data, with a strong beta value of 0.64. This finding aligns with earlier research by Noe (2010) and Saks (2006), which emphasised that relevant training increases employees' confidence and job satisfaction, leading to higher motivation. In the context of government hospitals in Sri Lanka, where work demands are high and resources are limited, structured training provides nurses with not only technical competence but also a sense of psychological readiness. This readiness can directly improve their willingness to perform duties efficiently, reinforcing the importance of continuous professional development in public sector health institutions.

The second hypothesis (H_2) also found that training positively affects work engagement. The relationship ($\beta = 0.68$) confirms that training equips nursing officers with skills that make them feel more involved, energetic, and absorbed in their roles. This supports the work of Schaufeli et al. (2002), who noted that engagement is fostered when employees feel competent and capable in their tasks. Especially in the nursing profession, where emotional and physical demands are high, training offers a source of empowerment and psychological safety, which in turn fosters deeper commitment to patient care.

The third hypothesis (H_3) demonstrated that work engagement significantly predicts motivation ($\beta = 0.71$). This confirms that highly engaged employees are more likely to be motivated, as seen in the findings of Bakker and Demerouti (2008), who argued that engagement enhances job involvement and intrinsic drive. In a Sri Lankan healthcare setting, where nurses face continuous patient loads, being mentally and emotionally engaged becomes a necessary condition for sustaining motivation under pressure.

The fourth hypothesis (H_4) found that work engagement partially mediates the relationship between training and motivation. This supports the idea that training not only has a direct effect on motivation but also operates indirectly by enhancing engagement. The Sobel test results confirmed that the mediation was statistically significant. This mirrors the conceptual model proposed by Saks (2006), where engagement acts as a bridge between organisational inputs (like training) and outcomes (like motivation and performance).

The mediation effect was found to be partial rather than full because training continued to have a significant direct effect on motivation even after work engagement was introduced into the model. This suggests that training influences motivation not only through work engagement but also through other mechanisms such as increased professional competence, confidence, and perceived organisational support. Therefore, work engagement explains part of the relationship between training and motivation, but not the entire relationship.

From a practical perspective, these findings are particularly important for Sri Lankan public hospitals. The results suggest that training programmes should not be viewed solely as mechanisms for improving clinical knowledge and technical skills. Rather, training should be integrated with initiatives that enhance employee engagement, such as supportive supervision, mentoring, recognition programmes, and opportunities for professional development. Such practices can help strengthen both engagement and motivation among nursing officers, ultimately contributing to improved patient care and service quality within public hospitals.

Collectively, these findings reinforce the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which suggests that resources like training foster employee engagement and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The results also contribute to self-determination theory, where motivation is strengthened when employees feel competent, autonomous, and psychologically supported (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The nursing officers who participated in this study reflected these patterns, showing that structured training and supportive work environments can enhance both affective (engagement) and behavioural (motivation) outcomes, even within the constraints of a public hospital system.

These results have practical relevance as well. Hospital administrators and policy-makers should prioritise not only the frequency but also the quality and relevance of training programs. Furthermore, they should develop systems that support engagement, such as mentorship, team collaboration, and recognition. As this study shows, doing so will not only increase work motivation but also improve the quality of patient care delivered by engaged and skilled nursing professionals.

Conclusion

This study explored the impact of training on the motivation of government nursing officers at Teaching Hospital Peradeniya, with a specific focus on the mediating role of work engagement. The results confirmed that training has a significant positive effect on both motivation and work engagement. Moreover, work engagement was found to directly improve motivation and partially mediate the relationship between training and motivation. These findings validate the conceptual model and reinforce the importance of not only offering training but also fostering employee engagement in healthcare settings.

In resource-constrained environments such as Sri Lanka's public hospitals, improving motivation through meaningful training and emotional engagement is essential for enhancing service quality and employee well-being. The study highlights that motivation is not driven by training alone; it is strengthened when employees are also emotionally and cognitively connected to their work. Theoretically, this research supports the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and self-determination theory, showing that personal and organisational resources, such as training and engagement, are critical drivers of work motivation. It also contributes to the limited body of literature on healthcare employee motivation in South Asian public-sector contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, hospital administrators should implement regular and role-specific training programmes that address both clinical competencies and professional development needs. Training programmes should be designed to enhance not only technical knowledge but also employee confidence and preparedness for workplace challenges. In addition, healthcare managers should strengthen employee engagement through supportive supervision, recognition mechanisms, mentoring opportunities, and greater employee participation in workplace decision-making. Such initiatives can enhance both work engagement and employee motivation among government nursing officers, thereby contributing to improved healthcare service quality and patient outcomes.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations. First, data were collected from a single public hospital, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other healthcare institutions in Sri Lanka. Second, the cross-sectional research design limits the ability to establish causal relationships among the variables. Third, the study relied on self-reported responses, which may be subject to respondent bias despite the measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Future research may examine similar relationships across multiple hospitals and healthcare settings using longitudinal research designs. Researchers may also investigate additional factors such as leadership support, organisational culture, job satisfaction, and psychological empowerment that may influence employee motivation within the healthcare sector.

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