



INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL ON WORK ENGAGEMENT: A STUDY ON COLLEGE LECTURERS

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Abstract

The study aims to examine the influence of the four core dimensions of psychological capital i.e., self-efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism on the work engagement of college lecturers teaching in Panjab University affiliated colleges at Ludhiana and Chandigarh. A positive and significant correlation was reported between self-efficacy, hope, resiliency, optimism and employee engagement. The findings suggested Hope as the most significant predictor of work engagement explaining around 41% variance. The study suggests college managements to take into consideration, the significance of enhancing the personal resources i.e., self-efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism of the teachers so as to augment their engagement levels, which would further go a long way in helping students learn better from them.

Key words: Hope, Psychological capital, Resilience, Self-efficacy, Teachers, Work engagement.

Introduction

“What is good about life is as genuine as what is bad, and therefore, deserves equal attention” (Peterson, 2006).

The above statement emphasises on the importance of positivity in life. Positive organizational behaviour (POB) - the term denoting positive attitudes at workplace has been defined as “the study and application of positively-oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (Luthans, 2002). Over the last two decades, psychological capital has emerged as an important constituent of POB literature which includes in its fold, concepts like positive affectivity, organisational scholarship behaviour, job satisfaction, job commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour etc. A number of researchers, primarily Luthans and Youssef (2007), who developed the construct of psychological capital have proved



how the psychological capacities of human resources can be utilised effectively. All occupations require employees who are psychologically connected to their work, willing to fully invest themselves and are committed to their organisations. One such occupation which, despite of being very challenging but highly underrated and under-researched is Teaching profession. Teachers have always been deluged with heavy workload of teaching, research and part-time administrative tasks which have led to burnout issues among them. Covid-19 outbreak further unleashed numerous challenges for them. Teachers across the globe, despite the digital gap are struggling to teach on online platforms. They are constantly developing and using innovative teaching pedagogies to ensure their students' interest is maintained. This has made their job highly demanding and stressful. There are scanty studies on the challenges faced by teachers and the role of psychological capital in boosting their morale, effectiveness and engagement. The current study takes into consideration psychological capital as an important resource for defending against negative emotions. PsyCap resources viz self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and optimism were proposed as the competencies that teachers may need, to be able to effectively survive in this highly stressful profession and display high levels of performance in and outside the classroom.

Psychological capital

Psychological capital refers to an individual's psychological capacity which can be measured, developed and managed for performance improvement (Luthans, 2002). Drawn from positive psychology and organisational behaviour, the concept of psychological capital is defined as "an individual's positive psychological state of development which is further characterized by having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed in challenging tasks; making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding in future; persevering towards one's goals and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed and when beset by problems and adversities, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success" (Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2007). The term represents an individual's motivational predispositions which tend to increase through positive psychological constructs (Luthans et al., 2007). Psychological Capital, as a resource goes beyond "what you know" (i.e., experience, knowledge, skills and abilities) and "who you know" (i.e., relationships, networks) to "who you are" here and "who you can become" in future if your psychological resources are duly developed in the workplace (Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004).

PsyCap has been theoretically identified and defined as composed of self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resiliency. These resources denote "one's positive appraisal of circumstances and probability for success based on motivated effort and perseverance" (Luthans et al., 2007). Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in his capabilities to produce behaviours that are required to produce specific achievements (Bandura, 1977). It reflects confidence in one's ability to control



one's feelings, motivation and behaviour. It is the belief that one can perform tough tasks by taking them up as challenges and looking at the difficulties in the eye. Snyder, Harris, Anderson, Holleran, Irving, Sigmon & Harney (1991) define Hope as “A positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (planning to meet goals).” It is characterised by strong determination and intrinsic motivation to overcome obstacles and accomplish goals (Snyder, 2002). Optimism is defined as a cognitive characteristic in terms of expectancy of positive outcomes and/or a positive causal attribution. Optimism is considered both, motivated and motivating (Peterson, 2000). Resiliency has been defined by Luthans (2002) as “The capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, failure, or even positive events, progress, and increased responsibility.” Resilient individuals are the ones who ‘bounce back’ from stressful situations quickly and efficiently, just like the resilient metals, which bend, but don’t break (Lazarus,1993).

Research shows a strong relationship between psychological capital and employee outcomes (Luthans et al.,2007). Psychological capital has been found positively related to job involvement, innovative job performance, quality of work life, organisational citizenship behaviour, wellbeing and life satisfaction (Nafei, 2015; Tripathi 2011). Luthans, Avey, Avolio and Peterson (2010) stated how PsyCap could explain the variance in the measures of employee wellbeing over time. Joya and Edan (2016) also established the fact that PsyCap aids in managing employee turnover intent, stress and workplace deviance. Job attitudes and performance, and organizational citizenship behaviour were found positively associated with PsyCap.

Work engagement

Work Engagement is referred to as a persistent positive attitude towards ones’ work, characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez Roma & Bakker, 2002). Kahn (1990) proposed engagement as a state in which employees bring in their personal selves at work, invest their energy and experience an emotional connection with their work. Macey and Schneider (2008) described the concept as a positive, energetic and fulfilling state of mind, meaning that engaged employees experience higher energy levels while being enthusiastically focused in their work. Work engagement is a concept that represents active allocation of personal resources toward the tasks allotted in the job (Kanfer, 1990).

Work engagement is composed of three components i.e. vigour, dedication and absorption. The vigour dimension is characterized by high energy levels and mental resilience while one is working. Even when faced with difficulties, individuals continue putting in efforts in their jobs. Dedication refers to a strong sense of pride among individuals while doing their work. Such individuals remain full of zeal, stay inspired and always find their job meaningful. Absorption refers to the extent to which individuals are fully engrossed in their work and feel content by



what they do. They tend to experience the time passing by faster than usual and find it difficult to detach themselves from their work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010).

One of the reasons why work engagement is becoming a popular concept is that it is a very good predictor of employee and organisational outcomes. Higher dedication towards work and work-related activities makes employees display better in-role task performance (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011). Work engagement is also associated with employee wellbeing and job performance (Halbesleben, 2010). Work engagement is considered to be driven by both job and personal resources of an employee as given in Job Demands–Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Work engagement has been positively associated with optimism and self-efficacy, and job resources like autonomy, leadership, social support (Halbesleben, 2010; Christian et al., 2011). But it has been found negatively related to job demands like Work-family conflict, role ambiguity, role and work overload etc. (Christian et al., 2011; Halbesleben, 2010).

Furthermore, previous studies showed that work engagement was directly associated with teacher efficacy (Høigaard, Giske, & Sundsli, 2012). Teaching profession is known for having many job demands (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978) which have been found strongly linked with burnout. Increased pressure on teachers has added an additional layer of complexity and stress in their jobs (Crute, 2004) which may lead to gaps in their performance, unmet expectations and negativity. There are also chances of burnout due to the working conditions (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991) that affects teachers' psychological ability to focus and respond to classroom developments thereby, gradually reducing their effectiveness (Travers & Cooper, 1994). It has been observed that the teachers who were able to draw upon job resources like job control, support, and innovativeness became more engaged in their work (Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2005).

Review of Literature

Psychological capital has been linked with numerous work attitudes as well as job performance (Luthans et al., 2007); employees had higher levels of job satisfaction, work happiness and (Avey et al., 2011; Youssef and Luthans, 2007) work engagement (Karatepe and Avci, 2017; Paek et al., 2015) when they possessed higher levels of psychological capital. Herbert (2011) proved that higher PsyCap enabled an employee to evaluate the job resources, available support, interpersonal relations and career opportunities more positively and use them more effectively. She found that developing PsyCap in turn increased engagement. There have been many empirical evidences demonstrating psychological capital as an important antecedent of work engagement (Herbert, 2011; Simons & Buitendach, 2013). Hodges (2010) found significant correlations between PsyCap, employee engagement and performance. Kotze (2018) also supported the fact that PsyCap positively influenced work engagement (vigour and dedication), with a slightly stronger positive influence on vigour than on dedication. Paek, Schucker, Kim



and Lee (2015) found that the front-line employees with higher levels of PsyCap were more engaged with their work and displayed higher job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment. They stated PsyCap as a significant factor that influenced work-related outcomes. Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman, and Combs (2006) opined that employees with higher PsyCap used positive emotions to recover from setbacks rapidly (resilience) as well as showed higher levels of work engagement (Larson and Luthans, 2006). Sweetman and Luthans (2010) stated that psychological capital connects work engagement through positive emotions, which is also part of the job demands-resources model (JD-R; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Karatepe and Karadas (2015) also indicated that employees with higher psychological capital were more vigorous, dedicated and happily immersed in their work (Karatepe and Avci, 2017). Simons and Buitendach (2013) showed that the integrated construct of PsyCap had more influence on the outcome of work engagement than its four components separately, while Schaufeli and Salanova (2007) found that employees with a high level of self-efficacy had higher job engagement and possessed unending momentum to break through the challenges. Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2007) found that self-efficacy and optimism significantly influenced work engagement of employees.

Psychological capital has also been found playing a partial mediating as well as a moderating role between workplace fun and work engagement and helped strengthen the relationship between the two variables (Tsaur, Hsu & Lin, 2019). Karatepe and Karadas (2014) proposed and tested a model that examined whether work engagement mediated the impact of PsyCap on job, career and life satisfaction. Specifically, self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience were found to jointly foster employees' work engagement that in turn led to job, career and life satisfaction. In short, the indicators of PsyCap influenced job, career and life satisfaction directly and indirectly through work engagement. The results also stated optimism as the best indicator of psychological capital, followed by resilience, self-efficacy and hope. The study suggested the importance of a resourceful work environment where training, empowerment, rewards and career opportunities help stimulate employees' positive emotions which in turn enhanced their PsyCap. Murthy (2014) found that advantageous workplace outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, employee commitment and organisational performance were achieved when work engagement levels were high among the employees (Geldenhuis, Laba & Venter, 2014).

PsyCap has been observed to be having a positive relationship with work engagement of teachers. (Nafa & Ishak, 2016). According to JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti 2008), self-efficacy was hypothesized as one of the main personal resources predicting work engagement. Teachers who generally experienced more positive emotions towards their students were found to be more engaged in their work. Such teachers felt more confident when facing problems and found their work meaningful (Burić & Macuka, 2018). A study by Shu-Ling Chen (2015) supported PsyCap as a potential valuable psychological resource that may lead to increased



employee job engagement. The findings also provided empirical support for Sweetman and Luthans' (2010) argument that a key component in developing job engagement could be found in developing PsyCap.

Hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant impact of self-efficacy on work engagement.

H2: There is a significant impact of hope on work engagement.

H3: There is a significant impact of optimism on work engagement.

H4: There is a significant impact of resiliency on work engagement.

Research methodology

Research design

The research is descriptive and empirical in nature.

Need for study

Over the last two decades, psychological capital has gained prominence in the POB literature. However, further studies are still needed in this area, particularly in the context of educational institutions. In recent years, the job of college teachers working in both public and private colleges has become increasingly demanding and complex, thereby causing higher levels of stress, depression, burnout, negative emotions, anger, and turnover among them (Jalongo & Heider, 2006). In this regard, psychological capital becomes an important concern, and has been considered as an effective construct for defending against negative emotions and burnout. Thus, the current study aims to understand how the personal resources of college teachers namely self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience enhance their work engagement.

Objectives:

1. To study the work engagement levels of college teachers.
2. The analyse the relationship and impact of self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and optimism on work engagement of college teachers.

Sample

200 teachers teaching in colleges at Ludhiana and Chandigarh were asked to fill the questionnaires on psychological capital and work engagement. 184 teachers participated in the



survey, making response rate equal to 92%. Of the total participants, females constituted 79% while males constituted 21% of the total.

Scales used:

Psychological capital

Psychological capital scale by Luthans, Avey, Avolio (2007) consisting of 24 items was adopted for the study. Each of the four dimensions i.e., self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and optimism is measured by six items. The scale is a widely used scale and has undergone several psychometric analyses from various sectors. The participants were asked to rank 24 statements on a 6-point Likert scale (6= Strongly agree, 5= Agree, 4= somewhat agree, 3= somewhat disagree, 2=disagree, 1= strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha was .89 for this scale.

Work engagement

Ulrech work engagement scale (UWES-9) scale by Schaufeli & Bakker (2003) was used for measuring work engagement of teachers. It is a shortened version of UWES scale, consisting of 9 items. Each of the dimensions of work engagement i.e., vigour, dedication and absorption is measured by three items. Participants were asked to rank the items on a 7-point Likert scale (7= always, 6= very often, 5=often, 4=sometimes, 3=rarely, 2= almost never, 1=never). Cronbach’s alpha was .88 for this scale.

Analysis and interpretation

Table I: Mean scores of males and females

Gender	SE	HP	RES	OPTM	PSY	WE
Male	26.4	26.2	25.6	24.3	102.7	34.5
Female	27.3	26.8	26.4	24.1	104.7	36.0

As can be inferred from table I, mean self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and optimism scores of male teachers are 26.4, 26.2, 25.6, 24.3 respectively whereas female teachers score 27.3, 26.8, 26.4, 24.1 on each of the variables. It can be said that female teachers score relatively higher on self-efficacy, hope and resiliency whereas male teachers score slightly higher on optimism. Female teachers score higher on psychological capital i.e., 104.7 than the males who scored 102.7. Women also have higher work engagement score i.e., 36 as compared to their male counterparts who score 34.5.



Correlation analysis

Table II: Correlation coefficients

Pearson Correlation Coefficient(r)	Self-efficacy	Hope	Resiliency	Optimism	Work engagement
Work-engagement	.620**	.642**	.335**	.522**	1
N	184	184	184	184	184

****Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

Significant correlations can be observed between self-efficacy, hope, resiliency, optimism and work engagement from Table II. Work engagement has positive correlation with self-efficacy ($r=.620$; $p < 0.05$), thereby meaning that with an increase in self-efficacy of teachers, there is an increase in their work engagement as well. Similarly, work engagement is positively related with hope ($r=.642$; $p < .05$); resiliency ($r=.335$, $p < .05$) and optimism ($r=.522$, $p < .05$). It may be stated that higher are the self-efficacy, hope, resiliency and optimism levels among the teachers, higher would be their work engagement. Similar results have been validated by Xanthopoulou et al. (2007); Simons and Buitendach (2013); Karatepe & Karadas (2014) who found significant positive associations between the dimensions of psychological capital and work engagement.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table III: Model summary

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std.Error
1	.642 ^a	.412	.409	6.82920
2	.671 ^b	.451	.445	6.61881
3	.690 ^c	.476	.467	6.48321

**Table IV: Regression coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardize d coefficients	T	Sig (p)	Collinearity Statistics VIF
	B	Std error	B			
1	6.305	2.575		2.449	.015	
(Constant)	1.080	.096	.642	11.29	.000	1.000
Hope						
2	4.089	2.572		1.590	.114	
(Constant)	.679	.146	.404	4.661	.000	2.470
Hope	.481	.135	.309	3.571	.000	2.470
Self- efficacy						
3	-2.798	3.439		-.814	.417	
(Constant)	.548	.149	.326	3.664	.000	2.711
Hope	.413	.134	.266	3.085	.002	2.546
Self- efficacy	.500	.170	.196	2.941	.004	1.525
Optimism						

- Dependent Variable: WE
- Predictors: (Constant), HP
- Predictors: (Constant), HP, SE
- Predictors: (Constant), HP, SE, OPTM

Inferring from the above stepwise regression results, Model 1 takes into consideration only hope as the significant predictor of work engagement with $b = 1.08$ ($p < .05$), explaining 40.9% variance. Model 2 takes into consideration two constructs i.e., hope ($b=.679$; $p < .05$) and self-efficacy ($b=.481$; $p < .05$) which prove as significant predictors, explaining 44.5% variance in work engagement. Model 3 explains 46.7% variance, considering self-efficacy, hope and optimism as predictors of work engagement. The model is statistically significant (p value $< .05$). VIF is 2.5, 2.7 and 1.5 for self-efficacy, hope and optimism respectively, reflecting low multicollinearity between the constructs. The regression coefficients of hope, self-efficacy and optimism are .548, .413, and .5 respectively ($p < .05$). Thus, self-efficacy, hope and optimism have a significant impact on work engagement. The hypothesis H1, H2 and H3 are accepted. Resiliency doesn't prove to be a significant predictor of work engagement, hence H4 is rejected.



The regression equation for our model 3, thus becomes:

$$\text{Work engagement} = -2.798 + .548 (\text{hope}) + .413 (\text{Self-efficacy}) + .5 (\text{Optimism})$$

Hope is observed as the most important predictor of work engagement, followed by self-efficacy and optimism. The same has been confirmed by Karatepe (2014); Ugwu & Amazue (2014) who suggested that the individuals who were full of hope had an enhanced level of engagement which further led to better task performance and that hopeful employees pursued strategies to achieve their goals by feeling enthusiastic and being fully engrossed in their jobs. Hope strengthened teachers' belief in a bright future and made them more determined to find innovative ways to effectively teach their students (Ugwu & Amazue, 2014). Also, the teachers who participated in the study stated that transparent decision making by the management, job stability and adequate research opportunities enhanced their optimism and hope which further led to higher work engagement and teaching effectiveness.

Summary

The study aimed to analyse the influence of the four dimensions of psychological capital on work engagement of college teachers. The findings of this study suggested hope as the most significant driver of work engagement, followed by self-efficacy and optimism. Resiliency was not proved as a significant predictor. Correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship of the four dimensions with work engagement. It is suggested that work engagement levels may be enhanced among college teachers by developing their psychological capital through workshops, yoga classes, motivational lectures etc. Also, the issues faced by them, both academic as well as non- academic should be periodically discussed by the college managements. These measures can not only help teachers develop positive outlook towards their job but also augment their engagement levels and teaching effectiveness.

Limitations

- A small sample size of 200 college lecturers was chosen which may not be a true representative of the population.
- The research was only conducted on teachers teaching in Ludhiana and Chandigarh. Thus, the findings of the study cannot be generalised. Future studies may be done on different categories of population.

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