

POB: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AMONGST PUBLIC & PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYEES

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Abstract: The thought for this article surges out of a direct implication of an apparently overt yet unspoken phenomenon pertaining to the field of organizational behavior in the context of Indian scenario wherein the world of work is archetypically segregated per se into government (secure but low paid) and private (insecure but high paid) sectors of employment. Although formal and informal sectors do exist as per established economic theories but contemporary Indian psyche is preoccupied with opportunities in the above mentioned sectors only. It is being hypothesized and proved herein through inferential statistics & tests of significance that, as far as the implications and extension of positive psychology at workplace is concerned, there tend to be radical differentiation amongst the employees in both these sectors specifically in terms of strengths, virtues, and the proclaimed core constructs; self efficacy, optimism, hope and resiliency of positive organizational behavior. Eventually, these results call for distinct human development and management practices. In addition to psychoanalytic discussion as epitome, some insights into the measure with special reference to the prevailing economic crisis and recommendations for future research are provided in the end.

Key Words: *POB, PsyCap, Government & Private sectors, Employee, State, Trait, etc.*

1. Introduction:

Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) as a guiding term was first introduced 8 years ago into the literature (Luthans, 2002a, 2002b). The purpose at the time that POB was introduced was to raise the organizational behavior (OB) field's awareness of the just emerging positive psychology movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) from which, it has taken its roots. Since then, it has been incepted into the curriculum with due importance and acceptance across the globe. Like positive psychology, POB does not proclaim to represent

some new discovery with importance and overemphasis on positivity, but rather emphasizes the need for more focused theory building, research, and effective application of the positive traits, states and behaviors of employees in organizations (Luthans & Youssef, 2007).

One of the most significant strides in the development of positive organizational behavior is evolution of a core higher order construct, a point of departure from the basic foundational roots of organizational behavior which have been

termed Psychological Capital¹. The most promising and comprehensive definition of the term, “PsyCap” is, “ an Individual’s positive psychological state of development that is characterized by: a) having confidence (self efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; b) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; c) preserving towards goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and d) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resiliency) to attain success” (Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2007).

There is plethora of documented research which has been done on these individual constructs that constitutes the so-called ‘PsyCap’. For Eg. In the workplace, hope has been found to be related to Chinese factory workers’ supervisory rated performance (Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Li, 2005), unit financial performance, employee satisfaction & retention (Peterson & Luthans, 2003), and employee performance, satisfaction, happiness, and commitment (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). On the same lines, resiliency has been found to be related to work attitudes of satisfaction, happiness, and commitment (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Empirical research on optimism in the work place is emerging nowadays, however, Seligman (1998) did find that optimism was significantly and positively related to the performance of insurance sales agents amongst some of the professionals involved in the study undertaken by him. Stajkovic & Luthans (1998) in a meta-analysis consisting of

114 studies, found a strong positive relationship between self-efficacy and work-related performance.

‘PsyCap’ can be viewed as “who one is” and “what one can become in terms of positive development” (Avolio & Luthans, 2006) and is differentiated from human capital (“what one knows”), social capital (“who one knows”), and financial capital (“what one have”) (Luthans, Luthans & Luthans, 2004). Notwithstanding these efforts in the development of the field of POB, specifically the core construct of PsyCap, studies done heretofore recommends the inclusion of other cognitive, affective, social and higher order strengths (Luthans et al., 2007). But, the inclusion of other positive constructs is undone as they are not in compliance with the empirical framework. This has made some of the most potential strengths open to development and has called for simultaneous validation of the same for further strengthening the core conception of the illustrated principles in POB research.

Some of the most recent advances in the POB domain are concerned with applying, developing and managing ‘psychological capital’ at the workplace. For Instance- United States based Gallup² organization’s consulting business is also based on the positive psychology ideals of identifying and managing employee strengths (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Moreover, they also include the demand for solid research backup (e.g., see Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002) which

¹ Acronym PsyCap is used most often in the literature for short form of Psychological capital by Luthans et al., 2007.

² The well-known polling firm that now has over 90 per cent of its world-wide business in management consulting and workplace development.

seems booming, even in the economic downturn of the past couple of years and can be considered as an excellent case study for the researchers who are interested in implications of positive organizational behavior.

This paper will be looking at one of the most neglected segregation of workforce into the organized sector of our country and will present a new comparative dimension relating to the sporadic researches¹ done disjointedly with the employees in government and the private³ sector. Since, the two most important things namely, organizational culture and climate is very different in both these settings, there tend to present some kind of similarities and differences in the employees of both these sectors. This study would be a deliberative initial attempt to find out the correlation between both set of employees and the intermittent differences among PsyCap dimensions as it will try to open new horizons in eastern milieu.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants:

The sample for this study consists mainly of government and corporate sector employees from National capital territory of Delhi. The data had been collected conveniently from both Governmental (Age range: 29-47 years; Mean=37.13; SD=4.3) and Corporate employees (Age Range: 26-37 years; Mean=30.90; SD=3.23) following a snow balling referral technique. In this way a data of total N=60 (30 Government + 30 Corporate employees) was collected. Nevertheless, the total self report inventories distributed in the offices of Ministry of Defense, Home

affairs for government employees was 100 but only 64 came back with 4 inventories not filled up properly, which were eventually excluded from the final data. Similarly, self report inventories were distributed via referral technique in an International call center, few private banks such as HDFC, ICICI etc, Insurance companies namely ICICI Lombard, Tata AIG Life insurance etc. Most of the private employees (Pay range:-10,000-40,000/-) were having a higher business degree (MBA/MIB) except the 4 call centre employees who were simply graduates in commerce stream and were simultaneously pursuing their higher educational degrees. The participants have come from almost all the major states across India for jobs in which they are currently into but a major portion of either type of the employees belonged to UP (including Uttarakhand), Bihar, Haryana, and Delhi.

2.2. Measures & Procedure:

2.2.1. Psychological Capital Questionnaireⁱⁱ (PCQ; Luthans et al., 2007)

The measure of PCQ draws from widely recognized published standardized measures for each of the positive constructs that make up PsyCap as follows: (1) hope (Snyder et al., 1996); (2) resiliency (Wagnild & Young, 1993); (3) optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985); and (4) self-efficacy (Parker, 1998) and the PCQ has demonstrated reliability and construct validity (Luthans et al., 2007). The 24-item PCQ (6 items for each subscale of hope, resilience, optimism, and efficacy) has responses put into a six-point Likert-type scale with categories ranging from 1 =

³ Corporate or Private Employees have been used interchangeably in this paper.

strongly disagree, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *somewhat disagree*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, 5 = *agree*, 6 = *strongly agree*. To reflect the state-like quality of PsyCap, the questions were framed to ask the participants how they felt “right now.” Further, questions were adapted to make the target context specific to the workplace. For example, 21 out of the 24 items contained the terms work, company, or job. The entire instrument can be found in Luthans et al., (2007). Sample items include : “At the present time, I am energetically pursuing my work goals” (hope); “ I can get through difficult times at work because I’ve experienced difficulty before” (resiliency); “ I feel confident contacting people outside the company (e.g., suppliers, customers) to discuss problems” (self-efficacy); and “ When things are uncertain for me at work I usually expect the best” (optimism). The PsyCap questionnaire has reliability in the range of .89-.91 from various empirical structural validation studies.(Luthans, Norman, Avolio & Avey, 2008).

2.2.2. Procedure

Since, sometimes it is not possible for the researcher to get the measure filled in his/her presence as the employees are either busy in their work or they are unable to fill up the forms the moment they have been approached owing to some unavoidable circumstances. To collect the responses a snow ball referral technique has been

adopted in approaching the employees via researcher’s acquaintance in each type of the offices. They were distributed the self report measures which after they have filled whenever they have got free time and filled in inventories finally were collected by same acquaintance in separate offices whom has been assigned the task by the researcher. Despite the fact that demographic data has been obtained and some of them are presented here but the intervening variables like gender, intellectual level, emotional quotient and the likes were controlled for and were not taken into consideration. The employees were matched in terms of emoluments, regional background and family responsibilities. This was necessary so as to get a fair comparative profile of both kinds of employees.

3. Results:

3.1. Descriptive statistics:

The data obtained from the employee’s responses on the self report measure was subjected to analysis and the means and standard deviations on each of the subscale dimension of PsyCap were obtained as mentioned in Table-1. The means of hope, optimism and resiliency are higher in case of private employees whereas self efficacy is having a higher mean score for government employees. Also, if we look at the overall PsyCap mean and deviation, it turns out to be greater for private employees.

Table-1: Descriptive statistics and Independent samples t-test results showing the distinction between the PCQ facets:

S.No	PsyCap Dimensions	Mean \pm S.D		t-values (2-tailed) Significance Level {df=58} [$<.05$]
		Government Employees	Private Employees	
1.	Self Efficacy	29.56 \pm 3.0	27.96 \pm 2.1	2.341; p=.023
2.	Hope	25.50 \pm 3.2	27.10 \pm 2.6	-2.10; p=.040
3.	Optimism	24.20 \pm 2.1	25.20 \pm 1.7	-2.018; p=.048
4.	Resilience	24.36 \pm 2.1	25.50 \pm 2.5	-1.867; p=0.67
5.	Overall PsyCap	103.63 \pm 5.0	105.75 \pm 5.8	-1.515; p=.135

Table-2: Correlation among PsyCap dimensions of Government and corporate employees;

Government Corporate	Self Efficacy	Optimism	Hope	Resilience
Self Efficacy	.233			
Optimism		-.098		
Hope			-.107	
Resilience				-.022

Table-3: Inter-correlations amongst PsyCap dimensions of Government employees:

PsyCap Dimensions	Hope	Optimism	Resiliency	Self Efficacy
Hope	1.0			
Optimism	.117	1.0		
Resiliency	-.061	-.413(<0.05)	1.0	
Self Efficacy	.139	.083	-.284	1.0

Table-4: Inter-correlations between PsyCap dimensions for Corporate/private employees:

PsyCap Dimensions	Hope	Optimism	Resiliency	Self Efficacy
Hope	1.0			
Optimism	.305	1.0		
Resiliency	.354	.306(<0.05)	1.0	
Self Efficacy	.037	.021	.188	1.0

Since, to get a composite PsyCap score, all six responses for each of the four subscales were summed and averaged to first get a subscale composite for each of the four dimensions. Then, the averages for each of the four subscales were added together and averaged to get a composite average for each participant's PsyCap score. Following these lines the more the value on individual domains more the value of the strength domain will be and ultimately the overall score would also be higher.

3.2. Inferential statistics:

The data on the basis of mean differences was subjected to a two samples t-test for checking the significance of means in the subscale and overall scores of the government and corporate employees. It can be checked from Table-1 where the t-values significant at 0.5 percent level have been shown to point out the difference between the dimensions. As can be seen clearly, government officials are more self efficacious ($t=2.341, p<0.05$) compared to private employees. But, private employees are more promising in showing the state of hope ($t=-2.10, p<0.05$) and optimism ($t=-2.018, p<0.05$) than government employees. Nevertheless, the final subscale of resiliency ($t=-1.867, p>0.05$) is not significant but still its value is tilted

towards the private end of the spectrum. The results of this type have been obtained as the correlations between the PsyCap subscales is not so high and it is negative in the case of three subscale dimensions as can be seen in the Table-2. In this table the values of subscale dimensions are approaching zero and even negative in case of hope, optimism and resilience. Table-3 and Table-4 shows the inter-correlations among the PsyCap dimensions for Government and private employees respectively.

4. Discussion

The results obtained in this study depict a new albeit weird picture of the psychological capital of the employees. As one can see, private employees have emerged supreme in the comparative profiling of the PsyCap dimensions and overall psychological capital. Does this means that government employees are low in positive psychological capacities? Well, a clear answer to this question still deserves elaborate research attention specifically in Indian context. But, as if for now if we go by the results presented hereⁱⁱⁱ, we see that private employees have higher levels of hope and optimism. If one study the phenomenon, one can certainly figure out that, as new multinational companies are arriving and a sort of job enlargement in the world of work is taking place owing to

globalization and expansion, the private players are providing alluring and more lucrative options to the workforce. These multiple options coupled with requisite educational and professional caliber of the aspirants help the private sector employees nurture the positive state optimism and provide a lot of hope and vigor in their ventures. Although, both types of employees are self efficacious in the skills they possess and the work they can fit into, but, it might be higher in case of government servant's reason being, the governmental employees are in a more protective and secured organizational environment. This security more often makes them at ease and with their enhanced well-being of institutional security and patronage, they gain the confidence to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context. As far as the resiliency subscale domain is concerned, it can be generalized that both the types of employees are versatile according to Indian conditions where resiliency is an inherent virtue and acts as strength to move ahead in life.

PsyCap and a positive, supportive organizational climate are needed for human resources to achieve sustainable growth and performance (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). However, as per definition and research, the PsyCap dimensions are state like, open to development and are manageable for effective work performance (Luthans et al., 2007). It is just a matter of degree as to what extent one possesses the requisite states that can help an individual in the long run. Of course, the states in possession can be nurtured for enhancing productivity and efficiency so

that one can become an asset instead of a liability. If we go by the world famous political economist Adam Smith (1977), who said that the wealth of a nation is not the gold or silver or the property it possesses rather it is the human resources which actually contribute to the wealth of a nation. He further quoted that in order to be wealthy it is imperative that there should be a healthy competition and self interest for a nation to become healthy and prosperous. On these lines, I would like to suggest that if the employees and organizations out of their self interests work on the positive psychological capacities in a way then both can reciprocally support and reap benefits from this commensalism. This phenomenon probably has the power to overcome even the crisis situations and it surely will strengthen the concerned employee, the institution and above all the nation.

Implications and Conclusion:

The research on positive psychological capital is still in its infancy; therefore a universally concomitant factor structure with confirmatory analysis should be propounded by the researchers working in this field. Also, the factors chosen to be incorporated in the measure are independent but they must fulfill the simple statistical assumption that, the within group correlations should be high and between groups correlations should be low. Further, if these assumptions are validated then this piece of work could become a stepping stone in terms of finding out the state differences in various working groups so that separate and viable strategies can be modeled for effective and efficient training of these positive psychological capacities. This

can only become evident with elaborate empirical uncovering of the construct in different cultures and especially in Indian context for better understanding of the phenomenology of the construct dynamics.

Directions for future research:

A larger randomized sample must be evaluated to test the consistency of subscale dimensions. Horizontal and vertical group studies should be done to help us identify the Indian determinants of PsyCap dynamics. Future studies must look at discrete and diversified

segments of organizations and the various classes of employees in different sectors as there are more or less no specialized researches documented until now and doing such studies will ostensibly enrich one's aficionado. Ultimately, this sort of exhaustive research would eventually help the contemporary human resources consultants, academicians and practitioners to plan, modify and execute wholesome strategy decisions in different settings. Overall, replication and reconfirmation studies especially in Indian subcultures is highly recommended.

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End Notes:

ⁱ Most of the researches, I have come across have been done in western cultures, although I tried hard to find out any of the relevant research that is done in Indian setting, but I couldn't make out a single one. Since, this research was carried out in Indian setting; it was useless to mention the results obtained in western cultures. Another reason of not taking up the review herein was the perceived differences in Individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

ⁱⁱ I have used herein the psychological capital questionnaire but as far as my review of literature is concerned, I was unable to find out the adopted version of the said questionnaire in Indian conditions where the psychometric properties of the above questionnaire has been attempted to be measured. Ascertaining the psychometric properties with standardization data in case of various working groups would also be an extensive research in itself.

ⁱⁱⁱ Since there was a dearth of the published literature in eastern cultures and a kind of absence in terms of availability in terms of Indian context I was not able to compare and point out with utmost confidence that the results obtained here are either deviant or concomitant with respect to studies conducted elsewhere.