

Role of Psychological Capital in Work Engagement Among Employees

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Abstract

All organizational and industrial setups largely bank upon their employees' capacity to devote whole-heartedly their personal energy resources to the work assigned to them. Work engagement of employees' is work-related affective-cognitive state of investing one's self in the work. It is conjectured here that psychological capital of the employees tends to play pivotal role in their capacity for work engagement. The present study aimed at examining the role of psychological capital in work engagement among employees. Two hypotheses were formulated for empirical verification. Sample for the study comprised 350 employees (their age ranges between 30-45 years). Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) and Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) were used to collect data. Data were analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Stepwise Regression. The results of the correlation analysis show highly significant and positive correlations between psychological capital and work engagement. Results of multiple stepwise regression revealed that only two indices of psychological capital viz-a-viz hope and optimism were found to be significant predictors of work engagement. Implications of these results are that overall psychological capital is essential for whole-hearted work engagement of employees. constructs i.e. self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience are very important personal resources that enhances work engagement among employees. The current study adds to the research pointing towards the importance of psychological capital in today's competitive work environment that will always enhance employee level of work engagement.

INTRODUCTION

In modern era of ongoing change, there is a need for adaptation to the changing environments and new situations to which an individual belongs. At workplace, individuals are exposed to competitive world, technological innovation, increasing globalisation and vocational self-management. It is, therefore, of utmost important for an individual to maintain one's personal and professional growth, update oneself regarding knowledge and skill to be required and to self-manage one's career. In view of demands faced by an individual along with various environmental and work-related challenges it is important to understand that how different individuals use certain resources in order to adjust themselves, and also how they react and cope with stress in different situations. Reaction to different stressors may be positive or negative but it solely depends on how individuals perceive or interpret various life events. Some individuals overcome obstacles more easily and are more resilient than others.

Moreover, workforce is the most important valuable resource for any organization. Organizations are like open systems that require inputs in order to produce products and services. The inputs required by an organization are not limited to mechanical or physical resources, but also include the physiological and psychological energy that individuals bring to their work places (Argyris, 1990). Work engagement of employees can make a difference to organizations as it can be viewed as an indicator of employees' wellness (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Employees in today's world want their job to seek their more involvement, as they are more interested in learning how they can perform their work better, they also give more preference to the new challenges at their work and enjoy positive interaction with the people in their work context (Challah and Unwin, 2004)

Work engagement captures the willingness of employees to devote personal energy resources to the accomplishment of their work-roles. It is "a state of mind, a continuous and pervasive work-related affective-cognitive state that is positive and satisfying, and is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behaviour" (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004; Bakker and Demerouti 2008; May *et al.*, 2004). When engaged in their work, individuals feel personally accountable for and dedicated to their job performance and feel that job performance is more important to them (Britt, 2003). It is also a social and organizational meaning-making process, as individuals engage into negotiating the meaning of norms and practices, and use and articulate their "preferred selves in tasks and behaviours that encourage connections to work and to others,

personal presence, and active, full role performances" (Kahn 1990; Billett and Somerville 2004). It is a process of investing one's self in work that produces a positive and fulfilling work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma & Bakker, 2002). Vigor refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience in working, and passion to invest effort in one's work and to sustain despite being faced with obstacles (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). This means that the individual feels motivated, eager and excited about their work even at the time of setbacks, limitations or challenges. Dedication refers to being intensely involved in one's work and experiencing feelings of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration and challenge (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). This refers to individuals becoming happily involved in their work and taking their work as important, meaningful and challenging. Absorption refers to being satisfied and completely immersed in one's work, to the extent that time elapses quickly (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). Also, the concept of absorption seems to be close to the meaning of "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) which is a state of optimal experience, although flow refers to short-term peak experiences instead of all inclusive and stable state of mind, as is the case with absorption. Work engagement is built around these three concepts i.e. vigor, dedication and absorption as they play an important role in summarizing employees' mindset and experiences in relation to their work.

The concept of work engagement is relevant for employee well-being and work behaviour for a number of reasons as it is related to good health and positive work affect (Demerouti, Bakker, de Jonge, Janssen & Schaufeli, 2001; Rothbard, 2001), helps individuals to extract benefits from stressful work (Britt, Adler, & Bartone, 2001), and enhance organizational commitment (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). Job Demands-Resources Model is one of the most commonly used theoretical model in research on work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Bakker *et al.*, 2007; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). In this model, job demands means those physical, social, organizational or psychological features of the job that require constant physical and psychological effort and are thus associated with certain physiological and psychological costs. Job resources, on the other hand, refers to those physical, social, organizational or psychological features of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, lead to reduction in job demands and the related physiological and psychological costs and stimulate personal growth, learning and further development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). This model assumes two central processes. First, an exhaustion process, which suggests that demanding jobs exhaust employees' important resources that may include their mental and physical resources leading

to the depletion of energy and to health problems (Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2003; Demerouti *et al.*, 2000, 2001; Leiter, 1993). Second, a motivational process which means the presence of job resources that enhances the willingness of employees to invest effort in one's job, which may result in work engagement. This process of enhancing job-involvement may result in decrease level of absenteeism, better performance, and higher client satisfaction. In addition to job resources, personal resources are also helpful in predicting work engagement of employees'. Personal resources are positive self-evaluations that are associated with resiliency and refer to individual's ability to control and impact their environment effectively (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis & Jackson, 2003) and studies have shown that such positive self-evaluations predict goal setting, motivation, performance, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, career aspiration and desirable outcomes (Judge, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2004). JD-R model was extended by Xanthopoulou *et al.* (2007a, 2007b) and it was shown that job and personal resources are mutually related and that personal resources can be independent predictors of work engagement. Therefore, employees scoring high on personal resources such as optimism, resilience, self-efficacy and self-esteem have ability to mobilize their job resources and exhibit higher work engagement. Therefore, work engagement predicts performance which in turn feeds back into resources. The individuals who are engaged in their work also appear to be engaged outside worklife, so it will be valuable to examine the relationship between their psychological strengths and work engagement.

Positive organizational behaviour generally encompasses analysis on individual basis of performance and in particular, on the development processes for achieving desired level of this performance. The term, Positive Organizational Behaviour was introduced to bring the concept of positive psychology to the workplace (Luthans, 2002a). It 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, 2002a). Positive organizational behaviour researches have traditionally viewed each of the four constructs -hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy more so in isolation with each other, but research on Psychological Capital views these constructs in relation to one another and the commonalities between each variable, to which they described as a higher order construct. Psychological Capital emerged from the study of positive organizational behaviour which focuses on the relatively unique positive, state like constructs that can have an impact on performance (Luthans, 2002a; 2002b). It has been related to work engagement and number of positive work-

related outcomes (Sweetman & Luthans, 2010). According to Luthans, Avlio and Avey (2007a), Psychological Capital is "an individual's positive psychological state of development characterized by self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience". These four constructs of psychological capital were precursor for the developing positive work performance by the employees and positive organizational climate (Luthans *et al.*, 2008). Self-efficacy is defined as employee's convictions about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, courses of action that are required to successfully perform a specific task in a given context (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998b). Positive sources of self-efficacy beliefs, like past success and positive emotions, increase self-efficacy beliefs, which in turn increase well-being and performance; on the other hand, weak self-efficacy beliefs result in poor performance (Salanova, 2004). Avey *et al.* (2009) suggested that self-efficacy increased organizational commitment among employees' reduced turnover intentions and is related to number of positive organizational outcomes. Optimism means attributing positive events to personal, permanent and pervasive causes and within psychological capital, optimism is defined as a positive outlook that is both realistic and flexible. It is positively, related to employees' productivity (Seligman & Schulman, 1986), positive appraisal of stress (Jerusalem, 1993) and is influenced by work support in predicting work engagement and financial outcomes (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009b). Optimism has also been related to work performance outcomes, decrease in job strain as well as helps in navigating the negative effects of stress (Avey *et al.*, 2009). Hope is the sum of "willpower" and "way power". It is the ability and motivation to anticipate plans to attain goals inspite of obstacles (Avey, Wernsing, & Luthans, 2008; Snyder, 2002). It is positively related to work engagement as the employees are dedicated to achieve work goals enthusiastically (Sweetman & Luthans, 2010). It also has been positively correlated with number of positive organizational outcomes which are crucial for employee well-being as well that may include job satisfaction, employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, on the other hand, have been negatively, correlated with depressive symptoms, anxiety that can hinder employee level of performance (Avey *et al.*, 2009). Resilience is defined as the "positive psychological capacity to rebound, to 'bounce back' from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure, or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility" (Luthans, 2002a). Resilience helps in maintaining work engagement by buffering the effect of burnout (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005) and through the restoration of energy and vigour it promotes work engagement (Sonnetag, 2003). It also enhances employees' performance and leads to job satisfaction, organizational commitment (Avey *et al.*, 2009).

Researchers found that psychological capital is an important resource that may lead to positive work performance as well as positive organizational climate (Luthans, Norman, Avolio & Avey, 2008). It has been related positively to outcome that can enhance employee performance including organizational commitment, organizational effectiveness, work satisfaction and high level of performance. On the other hand, it has been linked negatively to number of outcomes that could hinder employee performance including absenteeism, counterproductive work behaviour, turnover intentions (Walumbwa, Peterson, Avolio & Hartnell, 2010). This positive approach of psychological capital gives prior importance to recognizing and developing employee strengths rather than weakness in order to help them to navigate the challenging workplace (Avey, Luthans & Jensen, 2009). Also, it is regarded as a positive state that contributes to flourishing in the organizations and high level of effectiveness among employees' (Luthans & Youssef, 2007).

Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2007a) in a study found that employees who are high on work engagement level will also be high on self-efficacy belief, also they are more inclined towards experiencing positive and good outcomes in life and they see their work or role they perform within their organization as a basis for their need satisfaction. Bakker, Gierveld and Van Rijswijk (2006) study also confirmed that individuals having more personal resources will be more engaged in their work. They also found that personal resources like resilience, self-efficacy and optimism correlated with work engagement and have a unique variance in work engagement scores as engaged workers easily adapt with changing contexts. Also, they are more inclined towards positive engagement with the world as it is apparent in their characteristics of positive effect and openness to experience with absence of symptoms of depression and anxiety (Block & Kremen, 1996). It has also been noted that individuals with the trait of resiliency more easily handle the negative effect of high emotional demands on exhaustion and are more inclined towards high work engagement even after facing the high job demands (Bakker, 2007).

On the basis of this, it can be suggested that workers with high work engagement possess more personal resources, including optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem, resilience, and an active coping style. These resources further them to have a control and positive impact upon their work environment successfully.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the nature of association of psychological capital in work

engagement of employees.

2. To analyze the contribution of each of the four components of psychological capital namely self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience in work engagement.

HYPOTHESIS

1. There will be highly positive and significant correlation of psychological capital with work engagement.
2. Contribution of psychological capital constructs i.e. self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience in work engagement would be positive and significant.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE : The sample for the present study comprised 350 employees, their age ranged between 30-45 years (both males and females) and having job experience of 5 year and above. Sampling was incidental as only those employees were taken who were available and were willing to participate in the study. The sample was selected from different organizations / MNC's from Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali.

MEASURES USED

1. **Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Shaufeli et al., 2002) :** Work Engagement is measured with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. The UWES consists of 17 items including three subscales that correspond to the three dimensions of engagement which are vigor, dedication and absorption. There are six items for Vigor (e.g., "At work, I feel full of energy"), five items for Dedication (e.g., "I am enthusiastic about my job") and six items for Absorption (e.g., "When I am working, I forget everything else around me"). All of the items can be scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always).
2. **PsyCap Questionnaire (PCQ) (Luthans, Youssef et al. 2007) :** Psychological Capital is measured using PCQ which consists of 24 items. There are six items each for measuring hope (e.g., "Right now I see myself as being pretty successful at work"), resilience (e.g., "I usually take stressful things at work in stride"), optimism (e.g., "I always look on bright side of things regarding my job")

and self-efficacy (e.g., "I feel confident helping to set targets/goals in my work area"). All of the items were scored on a 6 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree).

RESULTS

The present study aimed to study the role of psychological capital in work engagement among employees. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used and Stepwise Multiple Regression was used in the study. Table 1 shows the correlation between psychological capital and work engagement. Table 2 shows the stepwise multiple regression.

Table 1

Correlation Between Psychological Capital and Work Engagement (N = 350)

	WE	VI	DE	AB
PC	0.33**	0.27**	0.32**	0.31**
SE	0.29**	0.25**	0.29**	0.26**
O	0.31**	0.24**	0.32**	0.28**
H	0.33**	0.28**	0.32**	0.29**
R	0.28**	0.22**	0.28**	0.27**

Results revealed that psychological capital has a positive and significant relationship with work engagement (0.33, $p < 0.01$). Also, the dimensions of work engagement i.e. vigour, dedication and absorption are correlated positively with psychological capital constructs i.e. self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience. vigour is positively and significantly correlated with all four dimensions of psychological capital i.e. self-efficacy (0.25, $p < 0.01$), optimism (0.24, $p < 0.01$), hope (0.28, $p < 0.01$) and resilience (0.22, $p < 0.01$). Dedication, the second dimension of work engagement, is also significantly and positively-correlated with all four dimensions of psychological capital i.e. self-efficacy (0.29, $p < 0.01$), optimism (0.32, $p < 0.01$), hope (0.32, $p < 0.01$) and resilience (0.28, $p < 0.01$). Absorption, the third dimension of work engagement, is also positively and significantly-correlated with all four dimensions of psychological capital i.e. self-efficacy (0.26, $p < 0.01$), optimism (0.28, $p < 0.01$), hope (0.29, $p < 0.01$) and resilience (0.27, $p < 0.01$).

In order to find out the relative contribution of each of the components of psychological capital which are treated as predictor variables in the outcome variables of work engagement multiple stepwise method of regression was applied. This method, over the hierarchical method, was used because no hint regarding

the supremacy of any of the individual component of psychological capital was available in the prediction of work engagement. Multiple stepwise method allows the entry of only the predictor variables into the model which have the highest t-statistics and continue to include predictors until the possibility of significant t-values at .05 level is exhausted. Summary of these results is presented below.

Table 2
Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis

Model Summary								
Variables	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE of Estimate	R ² Change	F	df	p
Hope (H)	.329	.108	.106	12.62	.108	42.256	1/348	.000
Hope (H) & Optimism (O)	.352	.124	.119	12.53	.015	24.49	2/347	.000

Predictors : (constant), Hope (H)

Predictors : (constant), Hope, Optimism (O)

Coefficients						
Variables	B	Std. Error	β	t-value	p	% of Variance Explained
Constant	26.26	7.30		3.60	.001	
Hope	1.07	0.319	0.223	3.38	.001	10.8%
Optimism	0.80	0.324	0.163	2.47	.014	1.5%

As is shown in the Table, the entry of variable of hope was made at the first step. Multiple R for hope is .33 which is significant at .001 probability level with F-ratio 42.26. Regression coefficient (β wt) of .22 with t value of 3.38, $p < .001$ shows that there is significant and positive relationship between hope and work engagement indicating that hope is a significant positive predictor of work engagement. The value of R² change, which is 0.108, reveals that 10.8 per cent of variance in work engagement is accounted for by the variable of hope. The adjusted R² being .106 indicated that the obtained model fit to the population tested.

With the entry of variable of optimism at the second level the value of multiple R increases to .35 which is significant at .001 probability level with F-

ratio 24.49. Regression coefficient (β) of .163 with t-value of 2.47, $p < .014$ shows a significant and positive relationship of optimism with work engagement indicating its positive and significant predictive value in work engagement. Value of R^2 (.124) shows change of .015 in R^2 value indicating that optimism tend to account for 1.5 per cent of the variance of work engagement. The variables of self efficacy and resilience were excluded from the model because t-values for both the variables ($t = .335$ and $.203$) respectively, ($p > .05$) were not significant which means that entry of these variables in the model would not have a significant impact on the models ability to predict work engagement.

DISCUSSION

The present investigation aimed to study the role of psychological capital in work engagement among employees. Moreover, employees' who are engaged in their work are generally seemed as an important factor for developing a workforce that is productive and whose main concern is the development of one's organization (Erikson, 2005). Engaged employees give utmost importance to their work and bind themselves towards work by devoting physically, cognitively and emotionally in the role they perform (Kahn, 1990).

The correlation between psychological capital and work engagement come out to be highly positive and significant (0.33, $p < 0.01$) which implies that individual with high level of psychological capital will also exhibit high level of work engagement. Some earlier researches also reported positive and significant relationship between psychological capital and work engagement (Bakker, Gierveld and Van Rijswijk, 2006, 2007; Xanthopoulou *et al.* 2007a; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2007b; Avey *et al.*, 2008) though the context and setting of their studies were different. It signifies that individuals who use more of their personal resources like self-efficacy, optimism, hope, resilience are more engaged in their work as existence of these psychological capital constructs within employees have been linked to employee job satisfaction as well as their commitment to the organization (Youssef & Luthans, 2007) which further enhances their engagement level at work.

Results also revealed that individuals high on psychological capital constructs i.e. self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience will also exhibit high level of vigour, dedication, absorption dimensions of work engagement. They exhibit elevated level of energy and mental resilience while working (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998; Maslach *et al.*, 2001; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002), are represented by a person who have a sense of significance for their work, are enthusiastic, prefer challenges while working with a sense of pride and encouragement (Schaufeli *et*

al.,2002) and are determined, attentive, prefer intrinsic enjoyment, have a sense of complete control (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002b). These individuals have a high level of self-efficacy which involves the ability of the individual to view the challenges at work achievable with required effort (Bandura, 1997), are optimistic implying that they remain confident about their role, are hopeful of desirable outcome of their effort. Such employees' are determined to achieve their goal and can develop multiple pathways in order to achieve those goals (Avey *et al.*, 2009), have high resilient power meaning they are likely to be more effective in various life experiences like adjusting oneself to the new environment and continuing developing even during difficulties (Block & Kremen, 1996; Coutu, 2002; Masten, 2001). Avey *et al.* (2008) found that employees with higher level of psychological capital assist individual towards positive organizational change whereas employees with lower level of psychological capital involving depersonalization and unusual behaviours were less likely to change. An individual in a positive psychological state has more valuable resources for cognitive processing and abilities to perform which means individuals with high psychological capital constructs i.e. self-efficacy, optimism, hope, resilience belief are internally motivated, produce alternative explanation for each and every problem, are more autonomous in their thinking and view every disappointment as a way to learn and progress. The results of present investigation and previous researchers strongly confirmed the first hypothesis which states that there is positive and significant correlation between psychological capital and work engagement.

Since harnessing of employees' selves to their work-roles and engagement require involvement at physical, cognitive and affective levels, while at work it was hoped that psychological capital index of the employee would be a significant predictor of their work engagement. As psychological capital of employees is the final outcome of some independent but interacting positive psychological resources, namely self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience, it became imperative to see amount of variance each of the resource tend to account for in the total variance of work engagement. In regression analysis only hope and optimism emerged as significant predictor of work engagement with the capacity to account for 10.8 and 1.5 per cent of variance in work engagement. Self-efficacy and resilience have been found to be non-significant in their value to explain the said variance. The value of adjusted R^2 shows that the model obtained can also be generalized to other as well as same population as well. Had the whole population under study been covered that would have explained .5 per cent less variance that it is being explained here one's ability and motivation to overcome obstacle and plan some strategy to attain goal is embedded in variable of hope. In psychological

literature relating to organizational outcomes, hope has been found to be positively linked to it (Avey *et al.*, 2009; Sweetman & Luthans, 2010). It is the optimism of employees which acts as a shield against negative influences and enhances the positive and realistic outlook. By virtue of their inbuilt psychological strengths here, two variables have emerged as significant in the context of work engagement. However, self-efficacy and resilience both respectively positive virtues in terms of their capacity to mobilize inner resources and adaptability to difficult circumstances in order to meet demands of the situations appeared as non-significant in the present case. The reason for this seems to be that many other conditions relating to structural context of the organization might have verified a lot, hence, restricting the role of self-efficacy and resilience factor of employees in particular and psychological capital in general.

The overall result of regression analysis indicates that major part of contribution in work engagement is coming from other sources which were not within the scope of this study. This suggests that in order to fully account for the work engagement of employees in any organization it cannot only be psychological strength of employees which results in their work engagement and finally positive organizational outcome rather a host of other factors both internal and external need to be taken into consideration because work engagement of employees and resulting organizational outcome is the net result of interaction of many factors relevant in the context.

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