

The role of psychological capital in building human empowerment: A conceptual framework

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Abstract: *Psychology as a discipline begun its journey in eighteen century has its culminated years in 21st Century when it shifted its focus of study from mental illnesses and disorders to more positive and healthy aspects of Human Life. Psychology abandoned the idea of focusing only on the negative aspects of human existence and adopted new ways of empowerment and growth. With the advent of positive psychology, the field started to study the positive side of human nature. The impact of positive psychology can also been seen at workplace with the advent of Positive organizational Behavior or simply. The objective of the present paper is to highlight the one important construct of positive psychology i.e. psychological capital and its role in human empowerment. Psychological capital is a higher order core concept that is based on the positive organizational behavior. The paper is conceptual in nature as it will take a look at those studies that had proven over the years the positive impact of psychological capital on human performance at the workplace and other domains of life.*

Key Words: *Psychological Capital, Human Empowerment, Positive Psychology.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Empowerment refers to all those steps and measures aimed at to raise and increase the degree of autonomy, self-control, and determination among people individually as well as in group so as make them able to represent their interests in proper and responsible way acting on their own authority. The term is originated from American Community Psychology and is associated with Julian Rappaport.

Over the last decade; the concept of empowerment has emerged as the main paradigm of development throughout different governmental sectors (Zens, 2007). Most researchers view empowerment as an ability to have control over one's life and over decisions, attaining power and utilizing resources in most productive way possible to improve the quality of life. While some others take into account; structural inequalities that affect entire social groups rather than focus only on individual characteristics

The concept of employee empowerment was introduced in the context of the organization by Kanter in 1977 and had a major impact on the management practice. Employee empowerment according to sociostructural approaches is set of structures, policies, and practices aimed at decentralizing. So far as the Institutes of democracy and citizenship are concerned empowerment is seen as to inculcate the sense of responsibility among the citizens.

The second kind of Empowerment Psychological Empowerment was considered to be a cognitive state characterized by a sense of perceived control, perceptions of competence, and internalization of goals and objectives of the organization. Psychological empowerment views empowerment as a bottom-up process driven by individual's intrinsic motivation towards his role. This contention is based on Albert Bandura's concept of self-efficacy were the true empowerment is less of authority based like the hierarchical structure of power and authority and more of individual's perception and cognition about their work and other aspects of the workplace (Conger and Kanungo 1988, Thomas and Velthouse 1990). There were two aspects of Psychological Empowerment, empowerment on the part of superior who empowers subordinates and psychological state of subordinate resulting from the supervisor's empowerment (Lee and Koh 2001).

Empowerment is the capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives (Robert Adams).

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL:

Positive psychology new field of study within the margins of psychology begin to make disclosures about the other side of human beings. Before the advent of positive psychology, the field was dominated by focusing only on the negative side of human nature and primarily trying to heal and relieve the human beings from the sufferings and illnesses. It was only in the late end of 20th century that President of American Psychological Association Martin Seligman emerged with the idea that psychology is not only about studying human illnesses and sufferings; it is not only about what is wrong with human beings and trying to heal these illnesses. Seligman called this approach of psychology as 'pathologically focused' psychology. There were three tasks before WW2 to cure mental illness,

improving quality of life of the normal population and third to study and explore the people with Geniuses but after the destruction of world war, the most funding and focus of psychology concentrated only on the first domain leaving the other two far behind (Linley 2009). Seligman rejected this idea of psychology and said that positive psychology's main focus is to study the positive side of human beings. He said that what is more important is to study the strengths and happiness. Seligman defined positive psychology as 'science of positive subjective experience. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi included in positive psychology's mission the need to focus on both human strengths and positive institutions. (Nelson and Cooper 2007). Seligman said that we can create a better human life by flourishing the true and positive side of human life. Unfortunately, these fixations on pathology led to psychology becoming a 'victimology'. Instead of viewing humans as proactive, creative, self-determined beings, psychologists viewed humans as passive individuals subjected to external forces (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

With the introduction of positive psychology on scene lot of research has been done in different domains of life and its applicability with positive psychology. The direct application of positive psychology in the management practice is Positive organizational Behavior or simply POB. Fred Luthans defined the Positive Organizational Behavior 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". Using POB as the foundation point Fred Luthans developed a core construct of Psychological Capital or simply PsyCap. According to Fred Luthans PsyCap goes beyond the human and social capitals to higher level capitals. Luthans believe that this core construct can impact the performance at work more effectively. Luthans said PsyCap is not only the human experience and expertise that one gains over a period of time on certain things. The four main components of PsyCap are Self-efficacy, Hope, Resilience, and Optimism. The component of self-efficacy is based on extensive research of Albert Bandura. From Bandura's extensive theory and research, Stajkovic and Luthans defined PsyCap efficacy as "one's conviction about his/her abilities to mobilize motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context." PsyCap efficacious people always believe their potential and capabilities and they always choose challenging and difficult tasks for themselves. The component of hope in PsyCap is different from the everyday hope. The PsyCap hope draws mostly its theoretical background the Snyder research on hope. Snyder identified two important elements in hope that differentiate it from narrow usage one is Agency and other is Pathway. Agency is a person's internal determination and will to attain a certain goal and the pathway component makes people capable of devising multiple alternatives to reach that goal. When these people met with obstacles they cannot get into despair but find other ways to reach that goal. PsyCap optimism is not just about predicting that good things will happen in future. More importantly PsyCap optimism depends on the reasons and attributions one used to explain why certain events occur, whether positive or negative, past, present or future. According to Martin Seligman, the recognized father of the positive psychology movement, optimism is an explanatory style that attributes positive events to personal, pervasive causes and interprets negative events in terms of external, temporary and situation-specific factors. The optimistic explanatory style allows optimists to positively view and internalize good aspects of their lives not only in their past and present but also into the future. PsyCap Resilience is defined as "the capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, failure, or even positive events, progress, and increased responsibility" (Luthans, 2002, p. 702). PsyCap resilience not only bouncing from the adversities of sad events and life's miseries but it is also going beyond your positive experiences and the will to go beyond the equilibrium and normal experiences.

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AT WORKPLACE:

The application of PsyCap at the workplace has been studied in numerous studies. In one of the Meta analytical study of 51 independent samples were included (N=12567). The results of the study revealed that significant positive relationships between PsyCap and desirable employee attitudes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, psychological well-being), desirable employee behaviors (citizenship), and multiple measures of performance (self, supervisor evaluations, and objective). This study further revealed the negative relation between the PsyCap and undesirable employee behaviors cynicism, turnover intentions, job stress, and anxiety.

In another study conducted by James b, Avey, Luthans, Smith, and Palmer in which 250 cross-sectional employees PsyCap and its relation with two measures of well-being were examined. The results indicated that employee PsyCap was related to both measures of well-being and, importantly, that PsyCap explained additional variance in these well-being measures over time.

The role of PsyCap in building human empowerment and performance at the workplace has been studied in various researches throughout the world. In one such study conducted in Sri Lanka involves banking sector employees both managers and nonmanagerial. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between work attitudes, PsyCap and Job satisfaction. The study indicated the significant positive relationship between PsyCap, job performance, and work attitudes. Taken to the workplace, preliminary empirical evidence supports the PsyCap latent core construct and its relationship to performance (Luthans, Avey, Avolio, & Peterson, in press; Luthans, Avolio, et al., 2007) in multiple cultural contexts (Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Li, 2005)

The idea that positive workplaces are more productive modern organization tried to increase the positive human potential and capacities at the workplace in order to maximize the productivity. A major study of research on more than 10 million employees and 10 million customers suggests that managers were key to organizational productivity and development. It has been also studied in one of the research study that training managers on PsyCap will increase the performance of managers

Youssef & Luthans (2007) conducted a in which they examined the impact of positive PsyCap on work-related outcome such as work engagement and the results indicated that positive PsyCap have a positive impact on work engagement.

PsyCap has been linked with spirituality and addiction in one the study conducted in Iran by *Samad Rahmati* (2017) in which 360 university students participated in the study. The results of the study revealed that there is a negative co relation between psychological capital and internet addiction. The study revealed the nature of the positive constructs and their positive impact on live. People high on the dimensions of PsyCap efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience exhibit the strength to overwhelm by the negative events.

4. DISCUSSION:

Psychological capital has been researched immensely over the past decade. Having its bases in positive psychology PsyCap looks beyond the human and social capital and visualizes a man with full enthusiasm and zeal. The construct has been linked with varied domains of life like performance, well being, empowerment, job satisfaction, addiction etc. The results of the research that have already been conducted suggest that by nurturing the PsyCap components we can increase the performance at the workplace. The research consistently revealed that the overall quality of life in many domains can be improved by nurturing these positive psychological strengths.

5. CONFLICT OF INTERESTS: The author declared no conflict of interests.

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