

A Review of Psychological Capital Research

Xiaolu Zhang

Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Nanjing, Jiangsu, People's Republic of
China

zxl3825@nuaa.edu.cn

Abstract: Psychological capital (PsyCap) explains more of the desirable work attitudes, behavior and performance than human capital and social capital, it can be developed by some effective interventions to promote individual and organizational competitive advantage. The article provides an integrative review of PsyCap on its theoretical mechanisms, concept, measures, outcomes, intervention, status and future research.

Keywords: PsyCap; measures; antecedents and outcomes; intervention.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the early twenty-first Century, the American psychologist Martin Seligman (2000) made the call for a “positive psychology”[1], which explicitly focuses on assisting healthy people become happier, more productive and more potential by positive way rather than psychological treatment and prevention. With the development of positive organizational scholarship (POS) and positive organizational behavior (POB) [2-3], the benefits of positive mental ability or advantage have been gradually paid attention to in the field of organizational management and human resources. On the basis of theories above, Fred Luthans (2004), the initiator of positive organizational behavior, pointed out positive psychological capacities should be regarded as a kind of capital, just like human capital and social capital or even beyond them, which can be effectively developed and managed, and can have an important impact on individual performance and create competitive advantages for enterprises [4]. Based on literature review of psychological capital, this article summarizes the research status of psychological capital in definition, measures, outcomes, intervention and so on, puts forward the follow-up research prospect at last.

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

POB is defined as “the study and application of positively oriented human resources strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” [3]. On the basis of it, Luthans et al.(2004,

2005, 2007) [4-6] define PsyCap as “an individual’s positive psychological state of development that is characterized by: (1) having confidence (efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success.” by multiple revisions. After analyzing and evaluating lots of constructs or capacities in positive psychology, they concluded that those four kinds of resources: efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience is an interactive, synergistic resource set, rather than being in isolation and completely independent psychological constructs. Moreover, it is one of the most widely applied dimensions in psychological capital.

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL MEASURES

In the early study, psychological capital was measured mainly by a mature scale in psychology, such as Rosenberg’s (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (SES), Rotter’s (1966) Internal-External (I-E) Locus of Control Scale [7], John and Srivastava’s (1999) BFI-54 Scale [8], Parker’s(1998) Self-Efficacy Scale, Scheier and Carver’s (1985) Life Orientation Test(LOT), Snyder (2000) ‘s Adult State Hope Scale(ASHS), Wagnild and Young’s (1993) Resilience Scale(RS) [6] etc.

On the basis of the above scale, Luthans et al. (2007) designed a questionnaire(PsyCap Questionnaire, PCQ-24) to measure the psychological capital of enterprise employees, which includes 24 sample questions (six items per dimension), using Likert6 point scoring, with good reliability and validity[13]. This scale was widely used in almost all PsyCap research in many countries, such as the United States, China, India, Canada, Britain and South Africa, the results were in good agreement [9-10]. Avey (2011) developed a shorter, validated scale PCQ-12based on PCQ-24, which is used to improve the fitness of self-report and reduce fatigue in order to obtain a higher questionnaire reliability from participants. It utilizes 12 items psychometrically derived directly from the PCQ-24 items to measure each of PsyCap’s four psychological resources [11]. Harms, Luthans (2012), in order to reduce the social desirability and faking common of the self-report measures, developed an implicit measure of PsyCap, the I-PCQ scale [12]. It is an implicative measurement, the purpose of the problem has designed unobviously, the participants should describe from positive, neutral and negative aspects to finish the self-report initiatively. It is still yet to be explored deeply.

Other researchers have also developed some measurement to reduce the social desirability and faking common of the self-report measures. Luthans, Youssef and Avolio (2007) pointed out that the confidence interval can be used for element analysis, or the "triangulation" strategy is used to evaluate the psychological capital of the individual by self-evaluation, observation and interview [6]. Demerouti (2011) proposed a psychological capital measurement that uses others-evaluation, such as asking colleagues, superiors and others to reduce or avoid these deviations [13].

4. PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL OUTCOMES

The original intention of psychological capital is to improve the employee's performance by measuring and developing the psychological advantage or ability of the individual, so in the field of enterprise, a large number of empirical studies have verified that the psychological capital has a positive impact on the performance. With the deepening of research, scholars have proved that psychological capital has a positive impact on attitudes, behaviors, satisfaction, happiness, commitment etc.

4.1 Performance

Luthans et al (2005) used a three-dimensional psychological capital scale (hope, optimism and resilience) to verify that psychological capital have a significant positive correlation with job performance on Chinese employees (including performance by the supervisor) [5]. After that, Luthans et al (2008) took 456 Chinese workers as the research samples, further confirmed that the psychological capital framework still have a significant impact on the job performance under the cross-cultural background [14]. In addition, Luthans, Avolio, Avey, Norman and others (2007, 2008, 2011 and 2012) have conducted several psychological capital researches for individuals with different industry backgrounds and management levels, almost all the results of the studies confirmed that psychological capital are significantly positively related to the performance [15-17].

4.2 Behavior & Satisfaction

Avey et al (2006) in the study of employee absenteeism shows that hope, optimism, willfulness, self-efficacy and overall psychological capital have a significant negative correlation with employees' absenteeism, whether voluntary or involuntary. They also found that the overall psychological capital dimensions play a more important role in predicting employee absences than the single one [18]. Larson and Luthans (2006) in the study of the relationship between psychological capital and work attitude has proved that psychological capital has a significant positive correlation with employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and that employee psychological capital has a potential additional value to predict work attitude [19]. Cole (2006) found that the higher the level of psychological capital is, the more significant the effect of subjective satisfaction on reemployment is through the study of the relationship between the subjective satisfaction and reemployment of unemployed employees [20]. Tian Xizhou et al (2010) select the reception industry as the research object, the empirical results show that psychological capital has a direct effect on the attitude and behavior of unemployed employees, and produce indirect effect through employee satisfaction [21].

4.3 Happiness

Youssef et al (2007) found that hope, optimism and resilience had a significant positive correlation with employees' work happiness [22], Avey & Luthans (2010) also get the same result on positive psychological capital study, which proves that PsyCap is one of the core factors that affect the happiness of employees strongly [23]. Wu Weijiong et al (2012) performed a study about the vocational happiness of primary and secondary school teachers, the results showed that PsyCap could promote occupational happiness through energy

supplementation and motivation [24]. Besides research area above, Yang Xinguo et al (2014) did a research focusing on the subjective happiness of the left behind children. Through the empirical study, it is concluded that positive psychological capital can alleviate the negative impact of negative life events on the subjective happiness of the left-behind middle school students [25].

5. THE INTERVENTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

Psychological capital can be developed to gain a positive effect through a series of interventions (psychological capital intervention, PCI), which is the ultimate goal of psychological capital to carry out various dimensions, scale design, and mechanism of action. That is the reason it goes beyond human capital and social capital as a strategic advantage. The initial intervention model was Micro-Intervention proposed by Luthans et al (2006), which characterized by short-term and high focus, and adopted face-to-face psychological intervention [26]. Subsequently, Luthans et al (2008) also tried to use a Web-Based model to enhance individual psychological capital and expand the intervention method [27]. Wen Lei et al (2010), based on the PCI model of Luthans, used team guidance to intervene in the psychological capital of Chinese enterprise employees. Through the comparison of the experimental group and the control group, it proved that the PCI model could help the Chinese employees to improve their psychological capital level [28]. Gao Na (2011) took college students as the research samples and did a psychological capital intervention training for 6 weeks. Finally, the study verified that PCI methods such as group psychological training and outdoor quality expansion training could improve the entrepreneurial psychological capital level of College Students both overall and single factor [29].

6. CONCLUSION

With the deepening of research, psychological capital has a greatly expansion in definition, dimension measurement, influence mechanism and intervention development. As mentioned above, intervention and development is the final purpose and an effective way of psychological capital research to apply the theoretical and empirical results to practice. In the further study, On the one hand, we should enrich the methods of psychological capital intervention. On the other hand, we should expand the research object and the research cycle, carry out the intervention experiments in different groups and different periods, strengthen the longitudinal tracking of the intervention effect, and further reveal the dynamic rule and intervention effectiveness of the development of psychological capital.

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