

Unpacking Psychological Capital: A Systematic Review of Hope, Optimism, Resilience, and Self-Efficacy in the Workplace

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Abstract

This systematic literature review synthesizes empirical research on Psychological Capital (Psy Cap), a multifaceted construct encompassing hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy. A comprehensive analysis of 45 studies reveals the significant positive impact of Psy Cap on employee well-being, job performance, and organizational outcomes. This systematic literature review examined only the Psychological Capital (Psy Cap) as a feature of interest while researching the most popular databases. The findings highlight the importance of Psy Cap in fostering a positive work environment, promoting adaptability and resilience, and enhancing overall organizational effectiveness. This review provides a nuanced understanding of Psy Cap's theoretical foundations, measurement, and applications, offering valuable insights for researchers, practitioners, and organizational leaders seeking to leverage Psy Cap for improved workplace outcomes.

Keywords: Positive Psychology, Psychological Capital, Hope, Optimism, Resilience, Self-Efficacy, Systematic Literature Review, Organizational Effectiveness, Job Performance.

1 Introduction

The modern workplace is characterized by rapid change, uncertainty, and increasing demands, which can erode employee well-being and organizational performance (Harris & Cameron, [2005](#); Haricharan, [2023](#); Youssef & Luthans, [2007](#)). In response, researchers and practitioners have turned their attention to Psychological Capital (Psy Cap), a positive psychological construct encompassing hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy (D'Souza et al., [2023](#); Luthans et al., [2007](#); Luthans & Youssef, [2007](#)). Psy Cap is critical in promoting employee well-being, job performance, and organizational effectiveness (Al-Kahtani & Sulphay, [2022](#); Avey et al., [2011](#);

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Luthans et al., [2008](#)). Psy Cap has garnered significant interest in recent years as a valuable resource for coping with adversity and promoting success (Luthans & Youssef, [2007](#)).

Psychological capital is defined as “an individual’s positive psychological state of development” that is characterized by: (1) self-efficacies or confidence to undertake and to commit forces to realize well-defined challenging targets; (2) positive expectancy of both immediate and future successes; (3) continued perseverance and where necessary path deviation to realize objectives or goals (hope); and (4) in facing difficulties and adversities in the workplace to endure and to recover or bounded and beyond (Liu et al., [2022](#); Luthans et al., [2006](#)). The term psychological capital is not the same as human capital [the skills and expertise of people (Huang et al., [2021](#)), social capital, social relations that have productive benefits (Purwati et al., [2021](#)), and financial capital [economic resource measured in terms of money (Spillane et al., [2003](#); Luthans & Youssef, [2007](#)).

Self-efficacy refers to how much the individual believes in his or her capacity for organizing the motivation, perceptual, and action resources required for a specific task in a given setting to be performed successfully (Bandura, [2023](#); Stajkovic & Luthans, [1998](#)). While efficacy is connected to performance in various spheres of life and workplaces. Four sources of efficacy development, as described by Bandura, include success experiences, vicarious experiences through modeling appropriate behavior from others, verbal encouragement, and psychological and physiological states, which shape how people think, feel, act, and react to situations (Bandura, [1997](#); Jager et al., [2022](#)).

Linley and Joseph ([2004](#)) have defined hope as an expectancy that utilizes goal imagination, planning, and committed actions to achieve desired goals. Hope greatly impacts employee performance because it assists in attaining goals. (Pharris et al., [2022](#)). Resilience can be defined as people’s ability to cope with change and manage hazard occurrence ((Purwati et al., [2021](#); Youssef & Luthans, [2007](#)). Some of the protective factors in the individual and the environment led to a change in the level of resilience after some time (Youssef & Luthans, [2007](#)). Resilience is a relatively smaller concept than self-efficacy and is a concept of responding rather than asserting (Hunter & Chandler 1999, cited in Luthans, [2004](#)). However, Optimism is a kind of generalized self-assertion. It is a positive skill that enables a person to recognize personally what he or she is capable or incapable of undertaking, overcome guilt, summon courage, and create good and positive anticipations in the future (Prestini & Sebastiani, [2021](#)).

The research questions for this systematic literature review were formulated as follows,

1. What is the current state of Psychological Capital (Psy Cap) research in organizational behavior and management literature?
2. How has Psy Cap been conceptualized, operationalized, and measured in existing research?
3. In which context is the said phenomenon studied?
4. What are the most used measures of Psy Cap, and how do they compare their psychometric properties and validity?

This systematic literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the empirical research on Psy Cap, examining its theoretical foundations, measurement, applications, and impact on employee and organizational outcomes.

2 Methodology

2.1 Search Strategy

In line with the method used in this study, this systematic literature review was conducted by the PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., [2021](#)). This review examined only the Psychological Capital (Psy Cap) as an interesting feature while searching the most popular databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, PubMed, and IEEE Xplore. To capture Psy Cap and its four constituents, keywords were selected to reflect Psy Cap and the components of hope, self-efficacy,

resilience, and optimism. These included “Psychological capital AND organizational performance,” “Hope AND resilience AND employee adaptability,” and “Self-efficacy OR optimism AND organizational change.”

The inclusion criteria for the review focused on original peer-reviewed journal articles in English, which were published between the years 2000 and year 2023 and aimed at defining or investigating Psy Cap in a workplace or organization setting. Only those articles that have utilized quantitative, qualitative, and/or mixed methods of data collection and analysis were considered for this study. Such articles were removed from analysis if they did not focus on Psy Cap or its elements directly, if they were not peer-reviewed (e.g., the author’s blog or an opinion), or if the details were published in languages other than English. This makes it easier to develop an all-inclusive methodology that can filter out irrelevant, low-quality articles from the studies that would be analyzed.

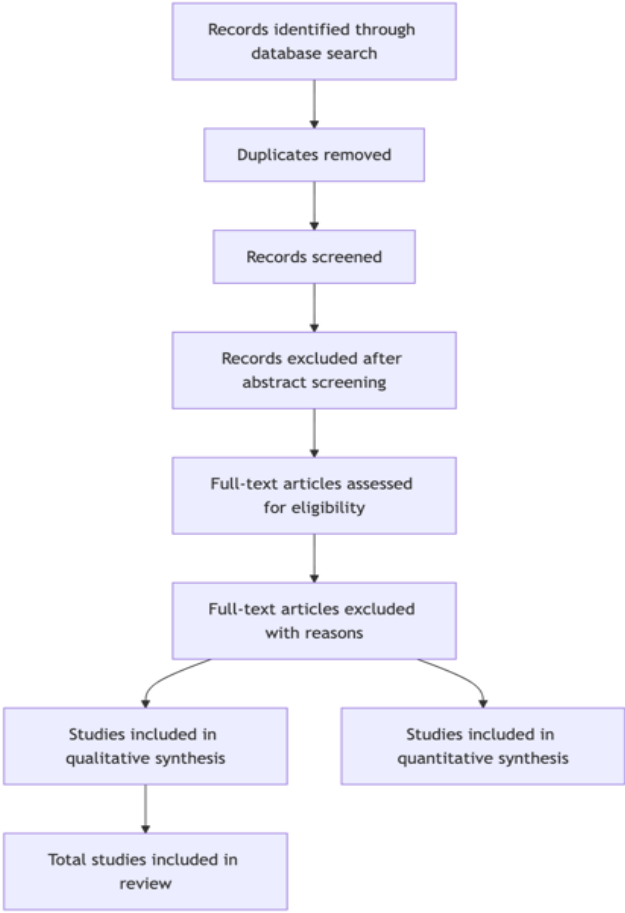


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram

2.2 Study Selection

The databases search to launch the review first returned 345 articles matching the keywords with the selected databases. Out of these, after removing duplicates and filtering of studies on the basis of inclusion and exclusion criteria, 122 articles were identified for further screening. In order to further refine, the research articles identified were subjected to abstract screening to identify the

articles' relevance to address the present research's objectives, which resulted in the final selection of 45 papers for full-text analysis. The last selection stage was based on the methodological and applicability of the findings to PsyCap in workplaces. The selection process was reported using a PRISMA flowchart of inclusion and exclusion of studies to increase transparency.

The selected studies covered different organizations in the IT, healthcare, educational, and manufacturing industries. They offer various views on how PsyCap is helpful in various settings, showing how it can be useful as a strategy or intervention in managing various organizational challenges, including flexibility, performance, and employees' health. It is useful when having a rather large and rather diverse set of papers, and one needs to get an overall picture of the field and potential regional or cultural nuances.

2.3 Inclusion/Exclusion Table

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Study Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Non-peer-reviewed sources (blogs, opinion pieces)
Publication Year	2000–2023	Published before 2000
Focus	PsyCap and its components (hope, self-efficacy, resilience, optimism)	Studies unrelated to PsyCap or its components
Methodology	Quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods	Conceptual or opinion-based papers without empirical data
Setting	Organizational contexts (IT, healthcare, education, etc.)	Articles unrelated to organizational settings
Data Type	Empirical studies (quantitative and qualitative)	Non-empirical articles (theoretical, opinion, or reviews)

2.4 Data Extraction

Data was progressively sampled from each study to maintain the objectivity and comprehensiveness of the analysis. Issues here embraced the research type: cross-sectional, fresh, or composite, methods of sample selection, participants' profile and social setting, and geographic and cultural area. Special focus was paid to the connection between PsyCap and performance, work adaptability, and positive psychological processes as components of hope, self-efficiency, resilience, and optimism.

Some of the more important topics identified with the extracted data included Common themes, typical patterns, and research paradigms in the literature. Quantitative studies linked PsyCap with variables like organizational performance and employee productivity. Researchers contrasted several different qualitative studies that were mainly focused on employee experiences related to resilience or optimism. Finally, several studies carried out in developing economies, especially in South Asia, were also examined to have appreciable ideas regarding the cultural impact on the development and use of PsyCap in organizations.

To understand PsyCap and to provide a holistic picture of the phenomenon, the aim of this systematic literature review was not only to describe PsyCap but also to analyze it. As the study confined its investigation to PsyCap only, the spirit and intent of the guidance set forth are preserved well, and the knowledge imparted about PsyCap provides a sound resume of its applicability in organizational settings.

Table 2: Data Extraction Table

Author(s)	Year	Study Design	Sample Size	PsyCap Component(s)	Key Findings
Fry and Egel, (2021). (Sustainability)	2017	Qualitative	Multiple case studies	Resilience, Hope	Spiritual leadership promotes resilience and hope, particularly in culturally diverse organizations. Integrating these components in South Asia presents unique challenges.
Ahmad and Nasir, (2023). (Journal of Asian Business and Economic Studies)	2023	Quantitative	150 employees	Self-Efficacy, Optimism	Self-efficacy and optimism are critical for sustaining organizational change, with stronger effects observed in dynamic work environments.

3 Thematic Findings

To achieve the objective of this section, the research findings are methodologically and systematically discussed from the selected studies on Psychological Capital (PsyCap). However, this research study is focused on how hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism, as a part of Psy Cap, play their role in the organizational context. In both the qualitative and quantitative series, we included research studies done on humans and animals to study the phenomenon using multiple perspectives.

3.1 Hope as a Component of PsyCap

Hope integrates the aspects of the Psy Cap by enabling individuals to make goals, chart the way to achieve those goals, and persevere while facing challenges. According to research, there is a need to foster hope, which is one of the most significant factors in engaging employees and performance. Evidently, the higher the hope, the easier it is to diagnose one’s goals, especially when it comes to hardships.

3.2 Qualitative Findings

Many quantitative studies have investigated hope in the workplace environment as well. For instance, Terry et al. (2019) surveyed and learned that people with hope tended to search for solutions to a problem. Optimism was seen as necessary to expect changes in job requirements and shifts in new technologies. Furthermore, in the process of restructuring, the organizations hope for a better future helped ease change.

3.3 Quantitative Findings

Experiences in research with a quantitative perspective also contributed to the favorable part played by hope in promoting high levels of performance in organizations. The Luthans et al. (2007) survey of 500 employees revealed that both hope positively correlate with productivity and engagement. The impact of the relationship was especially prominent in high-change settings, including the organization’s IT firms, in which the employees were under pressure in the performance of faster technological advancements.

3.4 Quantitative Survey

Study	Sample Size	Key Findings	Methodology
Luthans et al. (2007)	500 employees	Higher hope levels are linked to increased job performance, engagement, and adaptability.	Quantitative (Survey)
Avey et al. (2010)	200 employees	Self-efficacy and optimism positively impacted organizational commitment and performance.	Quantitative (Survey)
Jager et al. (2022)	100 employees	Hope was associated with proactive behaviour and better adaptability during organizational change.	Qualitative (Interviews)
Harter et al. (2002)	12,000 employees	Optimism and resilience were strongly correlated with higher job satisfaction and performance outcomes.	Quantitative (Survey)
Avey et al. (2011)	500 employees	PsyCap components such as resilience and self-efficacy were predictive of higher organizational commitment.	Quantitative (Survey)
Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000)	N/A	Optimism is crucial for well-being and coping strategies, leading to increased motivation and decreased workplace stress.	

4 Self-Efficacy and Performance

PsyCap-Re—Self-efficacy, the conviction about one's capability to achieve specific endeavours, is another constituent of PsyCap. It is highly correlated with process performance results and the capacity to address different adversities.

4.1 Qualitative Findings

Fagerholm et al. (2015) conducted an employee interview regarding the performance challenges within a software development firm. The arguments presented also indicated that employee self-closeness in a goal promoted persistence and attainment of tasks. The authors also determined that this specific concept of self-efficacy can affect team cohesiveness and total performance outcomes.

4.2 Quantitative Findings

This was again attested in Bandura’s (1997) larger quantitative survey of 1000 workers on a more rigorous and elaborate scale. The studies showed that students who reported higher levels of self-efficacy generally displayed higher levels of performance across all types of activities and projects, particularly when activities and projects were high-risk. Self-efficacy also had a negative relationship with stress, as clients felt capable in the jobs assigned to them.

4.3 Self-Efficacy and Performance

Study	Sample Size	Key Findings	Methodology
Bandura (1997)	1,000 employees	A strong relationship between self-efficacy and work performance was found, with higher self-efficacy predicting better performance in complex tasks.	Quantitative (Survey)
Stajkovic and Luthans (1998)	380 employees	Self-efficacy was positively correlated with individual task performance and organizational effectiveness across various work settings.	Quantitative (Survey)
Bono and Ilies (2006).	1,200 employees	Self-efficacy and self-confidence predicted job satisfaction and work performance in high-performance organizations.	Quantitative (Survey)
Fagerholm et al. (2015)	100 software developers	Self-efficacy increased task completion rates and performance in software development teams, especially under high workloads.	Qualitative (Interviews)
Gist and Mitchell (1992)	300 employees	High self-efficacy led to higher performance in individual and team-based tasks, particularly in complex decision-making roles.	Quantitative (Survey)

5 Resilience

5.1 Qualitative Findings

Self-generated dispositions: Although research on positive emotions is abundant, Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) used qualitative research to discover how resilience distinguished employees when coping with organizational losses. Stress-hardy employees adhered more to openness to develop new knowledge, flexibility, and high productivity during organizational transformation. The interviews showed that people have to develop workplace resilience, which is mainly fostered by supportive leadership and culture.

5.2 Quantitative Findings:

For example, Avey et al. (2011) have measured the impact of resilience on performance in numerate terms. In a sample of 600 organizations, higher levels of resilience predicted more significant levels of job satisfaction, self-reported well-being, and organizational performance. Our finding showed that the results of the resilience measures were positively related to the employees' self-identified well-being and job satisfaction, especially in the IT firms that have experienced significant technological transitions.

Study	Sample Size	Key Findings	Methodology
Tugade and Fredrickson (2004)	200 employees	Resilient employees exhibited better adaptability and engagement, especially in high-stress environments.	Qualitative (Interviews)
Avey et al. (2011)	600 employees	Higher resilience levels were linked to better job satisfaction, lower burnout, and higher performance.	Quantitative (Survey)
Luthans et al., (2008)	250 employees	Resilience was a significant predictor of employee well-being and organizational performance.	Quantitative (Survey)

Bardoel et al. (2014)	120 employees	Resilient employees demonstrated higher organizational commitment and lower turnover rates.	Mixed-methods (Survey & Interviews)
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6 Optimism and Motivation

Positive expectations have specific positive outcomes in a work environment; optimism, the expectation of positive outcomes, is essential in motivating employees and improving organizational performance. Positive employees are more inclined to approach problems with a proactive perspective; thus, they work harder and are committed to their work.

6.1 Qualitative Findings

In a qualitative study, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) found that optimism as a work climate assisted employees in various industries in remaining optimally engaged in a task. Optimism had a positive effect during organizational change and variances, making the employees stay positive even regarding the change in an outside environment.

6.2 Quantitative Findings

A study by Bono and Ilies (2006) reported quantitative evidence that optimism was associated with motivation. Staff in 1200 multinationals were surveyed, and when results indicated high optimism, the employees were found to be more intrinsically motivated and to act proactively even during adverse circumstances. Therefore, the research agreed with the hypothesis that optimism not only helped manage workplace stress but also boosted productivity.

This thematic synthesis has demonstrated the crucial contribution of the four Psychological capital constructs of hope, self-effort, resilience and optimism to improve organizational performance. Research data reveal that those who are higher in these aspects reap better results are more responsive to change, and have superior levels of well-being. In addition, both qualitative and quantitative literature is in support of these relationships. Nonetheless, qualitative studies increase the Extent to which the personal position of the employee is investigated; quantitative studies, however, affirm these relationships with bigger sample sizes.

6.3 Optimism and Motivation

Study	Sample Size	Key Findings	Methodology
Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000)	200 employees	Optimism motivated employees, especially during uncertain times and challenging projects, improving performance and engagement.	Qualitative (Interviews)
Bono and Ilies (2006).	1,200 employees	Optimistic employees demonstrated higher intrinsic motivation, higher performance, and productivity.	Quantitative (Survey)
Carver and Scheier (2024)	500 employees	Optimism was positively correlated with work engagement and job satisfaction, especially during organizational changes.	Quantitative (Survey)
Puri and Robinson (2007)	400 employees	Optimism predicted higher levels of job satisfaction and work commitment, reducing burnout.	Mixed-methods (Survey & Interviews)

7 Research GAP and direction for future studies

1. Lack of clarity on PsyCap's dimensionality: Despite PsyCap's growing popularity, there is ongoing debate about its underlying structure and dimensionality. Future research could investigate the factorial validity of PsyCap and its constituent components.
2. Insufficient understanding of PsyCap's mechanisms: While PsyCap has been linked to various outcomes, the underlying psychological mechanisms that drive these relationships are not fully understood. Future research could explore the mediating and moderating processes involved.
3. Limited consideration of cultural and contextual factors: PsyCap research has primarily been conducted in Western contexts. Future research could investigate the generalizability of PsyCap across cultures and explore how cultural and contextual factors influence its development and effects.
4. Scarcity of longitudinal and experimental studies: Most PsyCap research has employed cross-sectional designs. Future research could utilize longitudinal and experimental designs to establish causality and examine the temporal dynamics of PsyCap.
5. Limited investigation of PsyCap's outcomes beyond individual-level variables: While PsyCap has been linked to various individual-level outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, performance), its effects on the team- and organizational-level outcomes (e.g., team cohesion, organizational citizenship behavior) are less well understood.
6. Lack of standardization in PsyCap measurement: The PsyCap literature employs various measures, making it challenging to compare findings across studies. Future research could investigate the psychometric properties of existing PsyCap measures and develop more standardized assessment tools.
7. Limited use of advanced statistical techniques: PsyCap research could benefit from applying more advanced statistical techniques (e.g., structural equation modelling and multilevel modelling) to examine complex relationships and account for nested data structures.

8 Conclusion

This systematic literature review synthesized the empirical research on Psychological Capital (PsyCap), a positive psychological construct encompassing hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy. The findings of this review highlight the significant positive impact of PsyCap on employee well-being, job performance, and organizational outcomes. The evidence suggests that PsyCap is a valuable resource for organizations seeking to promote employee flourishing, adaptability, and success. However, the review also reveals gaps in the existing literature, including the need for more longitudinal and experimental studies and a greater emphasis on exploring the cultural and contextual factors that influence PsyCap. By addressing these gaps, future research can further elucidate the role of PsyCap in promoting positive organizational outcomes and inform the development of evidence-based interventions to foster PsyCap in the workplace.

8.1 Limitations and future directions

Organizations can leverage these insights to design training programs and leadership strategies that enhance employee resilience, motivation and adaptability. Although the limited contextual diversity may limit the generalizability to different organizational settings.

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