

## **THE MODERATING EFFECT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK ENGAGEMENT AND JOB PERFORMANCE**

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### **Abstract**

**Background of the study:** Psychological capital is increasingly becoming an important and integral aspect in the management of most firms across the world with the advent of globalization. Therefore, business leaders are making great efforts to increase their organizations' competitive capability, and raising employees' job performance is considered as one of the essential solutions. Thus, it is vital to properly identify factors that affect the job performance since this will be the basis for managers to propose recommendations to increase employees' job performance. The workforce in an organization will always change and be dynamic as employees retire and are replaced by employees of the new generation.

**Objective of the study:** This paper explored the relationship between employee's work engagement and job performance and the effect of psychological capital, which can provide a way to solve the contradiction between employee's input and output.

**Results and findings:** The study findings indicated that psychological capital moderates the effect of employee engagement on job performance of employees. Individuals who have a positive psychological state and initiative in making changes in their work environment will feel more engaged to their work.

**Conclusions and recommendations:** The study makes some recommendations for managers to increase employees' job performance by raising their psychological capital and employee engagement. In addition, managers should effectively execute two-way internal communication activities to make employees' needs, working goals, and assigned works at the personal level mixed match.

**Keywords:** *Psychological Capital, Work Engagement & Job Performance*

## 1.1 Introduction

Psychological capital is increasingly becoming an important and integral aspect in the management of most firms across the world with the advent of globalization. There are many components that come within the construct of psychological capital as a whole (Luthans *et al.*, 2007). The interaction of these components yields high levels of efficacy along with motivation of the employees in the organization. In addition, the workforce in an organization will always change and be dynamic as employees retire and are replaced by employees of the new generation (Ozcelik, 2015). Traditionally, enterprises have developed internally and externally to maintain a competitive advantage in industry. Enterprises must cope with the fierce competitive pressure from foreign enterprises by actively innovating mindsets, improving productivity, and optimizing available resources (Dan, 2017). They have to change themselves in many aspects such as business process, organizational structure, and personal efficiency (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2015). In order to adapt to the rapid and realistic changes in the world, enterprises must aim to change, not only in terms of productivity, but also the requirements for implementation and generally recognized as job performance (Ilgen & Pulakos, 2019). An employee with high job performance can help their organization achieve its goals and gain a competitive advantage (Sonnentag, 2013).

According to Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, and Li (2005), investment and development of psychological capital brings many benefits, such as increasing job performance and establishing a competitive advantage. After human capital and social capital, psychological capital is a new and superior form of capital (Luthans *et al.*, 2005; Lathan's, 2004). Besides, in the theory of psychology, attitude leads behavior is a prominent topic. Researchers on clinical psychology and organizational psychology suggest that attitudes and behaviors are closely related. There are many of employee's job attitudes that exist in the working context. Employee's job satisfaction is a specific attitude towards employee' job. Job satisfaction is a delightful emotional state that arises from assessing an individual's job when attaining or facilitating the achievement of work values (Locke, 1969).

The development of internal human resources has become an important source of competitive advantage and innovation for enterprises today (Yao & Yang, 2016). In the past, internal human resource development measures mainly included: (1) actively carrying out knowledge and skills training and improving the professional quality of employees to improve work efficiency and innovation ability, and (2) increasing the engagement of employees in work and increasing the

total amount of completed business to maintain the performance of the whole enterprise (Tang & Sun, 2011). Although these measures previously achieved some positive results, they may not be able to do so in these “Internet Plus” times and may even be a hindrance. The main reason for this is that the knowledge and technology represented by information technology have increased greatly. At the same time, the speed of updating is also very fast, and the cost of knowledge and skills training has been improved. In addition, increasing the work engagement of employees also increases the pressure placed on them, which is likely to lead them to fall into cycles of excessive fatigue and burnout (Rycroft & Kash, 2016).

In the new era, performance improvement brought by the acquisition of knowledge and skills has no direct link with increase in work engagement, which makes researchers and practitioners doubt that the cost of increasing training investment can achieve the expected benefits. However, at present, the emphasis of enterprises on increasing the work Engagement of employees to achieve the growth of human capital remains unchanged (Tang & Sun, 2011), in order to solve this contradiction, it is necessary to find a new sustainable development of internal resources to promote the improvement of job performance. In the process of finding such resources, many researchers have paid attention to the role of psychological capital. Psychological capital refers to an individual’s positive state of psychological development, which is manifested as: (1) when facing challenging work, having confidence (self-efficacy/self-confidence) and making the necessary efforts to achieve success, (2) having a positive attribution (optimism) to present and future successes, (3) persevering in goals and adjusting the approach (hope) to achieve goals and successes, and (4) when faced with adversity and problems, persevering, recovering quickly and surpassing difficulties (resilience) to achieve success (Luthans et al., 2008).

Psychological capital can maintain employee working motivation and alleviate job burnout. However, employees with higher psychological capital will actively connect with other resources, learn new skills related to work, and promote individual growth, development, and performance improvement (Wu et al., 2012). Psychological capital has a strong role in promoting job performance. In this context, what role can psychological capital play in the contradiction between input and output?

## **1.2 Research Objective**

This paper explored the relationship between employee's work engagement and job performance and the effect of psychological capital, which can provide a way to solve the contradiction between employee's input and output.

## **2.1 Methodology**

The methodology of this study is desktop literature review in nature and is deemed appropriate for the purpose of this research. The research methodology used in this paper is based on review of literature and focuses mainly on literature on employee's work engagement, psychological capital and job performance. The purpose is to offer an overview of significant literature published on these topics as an initial investigation that may lead to further research and contribution in these fields. The review provides an understanding of issues, unresolved questions and difficulties and highlights some factors that may contribute to the success of employee's work engagement, psychological capital and job performance.

## **3.1 Literature Review**

### **3.1.1 Psychological Capital (PsyCap)**

Luthans (2002) introduced the concept of positive organizational behavior (POB) that is applied in the workplace. Luthans (2002) defined positive organizational behavior (POB) 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". In addition, five criteria of the positive organizational behavior (POB) concept of Luthans<sup>1</sup>) must be supported by theory and research, 2) must be measured reliably, 3) must be unique and not overlap with other variables, including associate with corporate behavior, 4) identifies that the nature of the variables can change when the environment changed, and 5) must have a positive impact on behavior related to work on a personal level. Based on these criteria, it affects the behavior of an organization that is psychological capital (Luthans, 2002, Luthans et al., 2007).

Later, Luthans et al (2007) developed the concept of psychological capital, which is based on the concept of positive organizational behavior (POB) and defined the psychological capital psychological capital as the positive individual traits, which can be developed. The psychological capital psychological capital includes four elements: self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resiliency.

These four pillars of psychological capital play different roles in increasing the level of positivity and hence, help in increasing the levels of productivity within different institutions (Avey et al., 2009).

Psychological Capital is increasingly becoming an important and integral aspect in the management of most firms across the world with the advent of globalization. There are many components that come within the construct of psychological capital as a whole (Luthans et al., 2007). The interaction of these components yields high levels of efficacy along with motivation of the employees in the organization. These components include hope, self-efficacy, resilience and optimism. These four pillars of psychological capital play different roles in increasing the level of positivity and hence, help in increasing the levels of productivity within different institutions (Avey et al., 2009). These components of psychological capital specifically aim at increasing the level of goal-oriented initiatives taken up by the employees and also help the entire organizational structure to come up with a framework that will help in achieving the goals facing the firm within the stipulated period of time.

### **3.1.2 The Relationship between Work Engagement and Job Performance**

Work engagement is a positive and complete emotional and cognitive state related to work, associated with the characteristics of persistence and dispersion (Li & Ling, 2017; Aldabbas et al., 2021). Based on findings from previous studies, there remains debate regarding the relationship between job involvement and job performance. Some researchers have proposed that with an increase of work engagement, employee emotional, cognitive and forward-looking behaviors will positively improve, which will also lead to an increase in job performance (Wang & Chen, 2020).

However, some other researchers argue that an increase in work engagement does not necessarily lead to the continuous growth of job performance, which may reflect an inverted U-shaped relationship (Bouckenooghe et al., 2021). For example, the job demands-resources model (JD-R) proposed by Demerouti et al. (2019) proposes that the factors that affect the job performance of employees are due to two aspects: work requirements and work resources. Work requirements refer to the physical, psychological, social and organizational requirements of employees, which draw on their continuous physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) efforts and/or skills including their ability to deal with work pressure, work engagement, emotional exhaustion, work-life conflict and so on. Work resources refer to the physical, psychological, social and

organizational resources that can be used by employees to achieve work objectives, including the resources owned by individuals themselves, as well as the social and organizational resources that can be obtained. These include workers cognitive styles, self-confidence and behavior models, leadership, support from colleagues, family and friends, promotion opportunities, salary, working atmosphere, diversity of tasks, and so on (Demerouti et al., 2019; Qi & Wu, 2018).

When work requirements match an individual's work resources, increasing work engagement will improve job performance. However, if the work requirements exceed an individual's work resources and increase work engagement, this will fail to bring about an improvement in job performance and will also result in the loss of an individual's mental and physical resources, leading to energy exhaustion, anxiety, burnout, disappointment and other negative emotions, further reducing their job performance and leading to turnover and health problems (Lu & Tu, 2015). The empirical research confirms this view. For example, Adler and Koch (2017) and others found that employees undertake two kinds of countermeasures when work requirements exceed the work resources. One is coping with fatigue. Employees rely on their own subjective efforts to mobilize all the resources they can to maintain or meet work requirements. Such excessive efforts will cause fatigue. The second is a negative response in which employees are not willing to make full use of their resources to maintain or meet work requirements, and will actively reduce their awareness of work requirements, leading to performance degradation and other unprofessional behaviors. Therefore, when employees face higher work requirements and their available work resources are unable to meet this, there will be a negative impact on job performance. In the IT industry, the resources required by jobs often exceed the resources that employees can provide. The main reason is that the IT industry knowledge update speed is fast, and the staff's learning intensity and work intensity are usually high, which may lead to fatigue coping and negative coping (Kun & Gadanez, 2019).

Work engagement has three dimensions, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2018). Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, willingness to give effort on task, and persistent even though there is a difficulty. Dedication is characterized by full involvement in a job, having important feelings, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and feeling challenged. Absorption is characterized by full concentration and feeling happy when working, where employees will feel time flies and found it difficult to break away from work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2018).

Work engagement is positively associated with job resources goals, and can improve growth, learning and development (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2017). Demerouti, et al. (2009; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2018) did a research about JD-R theory (Job Demand-Resources) and state that job demands like working hours or time pressure can cause fatigue, meanwhile lack of job resources such as feedback, social support, participation in decision making will cause disobedience. Not only job demands and resources, psychological capital is also a factor that influences work engagement. Psychological capital is an employee's positive state that characterized by self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007; Sweetman & Luthans, 2010). The four psychological capital dimensions will produce and direct individuals to take useful actions to motivate someone to work harder (vigor), feel that their work is meaningful and (dedication), and fully willing to focus on completing their work (Rostiana & Lihardja, 2013). Bakker, et al., (2012) conducted a study and revealed a predictor that also significantly affects the work engagement.

According to Tims, et al. (2012), job crafting is defined as the self-initiated changes that employees make in their own job demands and job resources to attain and/or optimize their personal (work) goals. Employees who show job crafting behaviour will be more attached to their jobs, because they proactively try to align their work conditions with their needs and abilities (Tims, et al., 2012). In job crafting, individuals physically and cognitively change the task and relationship in the workplace (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). The physical changes refer to the scope, shape, number of tasks, and relationships at work, while cognitive change refers to how a person changes perceptions about his work (Bakker et al., 2012).

According to Tims, et al. (2012), job crafting is defined as the self-initiated changes that employees make in their own job demands and job resources to attain and/or optimize their personal (work) goals. Berg and Dutton (2008, in Tims, et al., 2011) reveal that there is important point on job crafting where employees do not change the whole work, but they change certain aspects within specific task boundaries. For example, job crafting involved more autonomy which can encourage employees to feel more responsible for their performance, and consequently they will be more motivated to give effort to each task they do (Parker & Ohly, 2008; Tims et al., 2011).

Tims, et al. (2012,) Siddiqi, (2015) states that job crafting is divided into four categories of dimensions, such as increasing structural job resources, decreasing hindering job demands, increasing social job resources, increasing challenging job demands. In the *increasing structural*



job resources dimension, employees may strive to enhance the structural resources such as demanding variety in their resources, more autonomy, responsibility improving job know-how from their employers to attain self-development and seeking more opportunity for their growth and advancement in order to improve the performance both at the employee or organizational levels. In the decreasing hindering job demands dimension employees may reduce the number of tasks by doing away with some of the tasks they feel both physically and psychologically uncomfortable with or they may consciously avoid engagements that make their overall job overwhelming. In the increasing social job resources, employees may seek guidance, opinions, ask for feedback from superiors, subordinates, or colleagues in order to improve their performance. In the increasing challenging job demands dimension, employees may attempt to broaden the scope of their job or mix and remix the tasks of the job to make it more challenging in order to maintain interest and avoid boredom in one's job.

### **3.1.3 The Role of Psychological Capital in the Relationship between Work Engagement and Job Performance**

The job demands-resources model proposes that work resources will buffer the physical and/or psychological consumption of work requirements, and regulate the relationship between work engagement and job performance. In the case of greater work resource support, job performance will increase accordingly. For example, Wang et al. (2012) found that social support and job development opportunities have a positive impact on job performance. However, in the recent development of the information technology industry in terms of internal resources, the focus is on developing and utilizing the existing knowledge and experience of employees. That is, paying attention to the development of human capital and relatively ignoring the importance of psychological capital of programmers to the development of individuals and enterprises. Psychological capital, more so than human capital, can predict the job performance and positive work attitude and behavior of employees (Tian and Xie, 2010; Yin et al., 2018), and is more likely to be an adjustment variable on the relationship between work engagement and job performance.

Therefore, when considering the JD-R theoretical model, many researchers have proposed taking psychological capital into account (Zhao et al., 2013). For example, Sun et al. (2014), when studying the JR-D theoretical model, considered psychological capital to be an internal resource for development that helps practitioners respond to various work requirements with a positive



psychological state, and one that can effectively prevent and improve job burnout and finally, improve job performance. Psychological capital has increasingly been found to play a positive role in the relationship between work engagement and job performance (Qi and Wu, 2018). Psychological capital is usually regarded as an individual's internal resources, which plays a positive role in individuals' work efficiency (Luthans et al., 2008). In the IT industry, the positive role played by psychological capital is also being concerned by researchers (Sihag & Sarikwal, 2015).

Organization needs to pay attention on employee's work engagement because it is related to important business outcomes such as the willingness of employees to continue working in the company, productivity, profits, loyalty, and customer comfort. The more employees have a high sense of attachment with the company; the business income will also increase (Rachmawati, 2013). In work engagement, there is energy and focus that is attached to the employees which makes them able to give full potential to their work. It can also improve the quality of responsibility and motivation to concentrate exclusively on what they are doing (Leiter & Bakker, 2010).

According to Vogt, et al (2016); Cenciotti, et al. (2017) in his research stated that there is a reciprocal relationship between work engagement, job crafting, and psychological capital. Psychological capital is a positive state of an individual characterized by self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience. The four dimensions will direct individuals to be more attached to their work, such as working harder (vigor), feeling that work is meaningful and useful (dedication), and fully willing to focus on completing work (absorption) (Rostiana & Lihardja, 2021). One of the predictors that make employee will engaged to their work is job crafting, where individuals have the initiative to make changes to their work environment related to job demands and job resources (Tims, et al., 2011).

Studies that deal with the relationship between the variables of employee satisfaction and positive psychological environment tend to reveal that the concept of servant leadership helps in increasing the level of psychological capital within the sales and marketing employees. With practice of this form of leadership, the employees are able to increase their own levels of self-motivation and reduce lateness attitude (Blau et al., 2018). As a matter of fact, this form of leadership helps in developing the psychological needs within employees which causes them to contribute more toward providing quality customer service and greater marketing of the goods of the firm (Liu et

al., 2019). This is in relation to identifying themselves as a part of the firm in the long run for a longer span of time. It is reported that especially in certain industries where the relation between the clients and the sales employees happen on a regular basis, the concept of servant leadership provides huge psychological capital to these employees who interact on almost an everyday basis (Bouzari & Karatepe, 2017). This form of psychological boost is also reported to increase the level of competitiveness of the firm with the help of citizenship behaviors that are completely service oriented. As a matter of fact, it is asserted by other studies that even though the general perception is that in case of management roles that are generally of a higher order and interaction with customers at that level does not need the implementation of psychological capital. However, the presence of importance, respect and accountability plays a large role in bolstering the interaction between such managers and customers of the firm (Newman et al., 2017).

Other studies suggest that it is very important for firms to maintain high levels of resources in order to retain employees that use a high quotient of psychological capital to interact with the customers and hence, improve the existing level of marketing within the firm (Norman et al., 2018). The manner in which human resources are treated and managed also plays a crucial role in the marketing of the firm as a whole in the community in which it operates. The concepts of inclusion, work- life balance, and other concepts that helps in improving the performance and productivity of the employees. The psychological capital quotient of the firm rapidly increases with increase in the number of initiatives taken up by the leaders of the firm for taking care of the concerns and the needs of the employees. According to reports, in the absence of such management systems and policies in place, the employees generally lose the level of commitment and psychological capital which induces negativity and lateness attitude. If this behavior related to tardiness persists in the long run, the average businesses in the United States go through a loss of around \$3 billion on an annual basis (Bouzari & Karatepe, 2017). Thus, the variables of psychological capital and job performance even though not vividly explored in the past are related in a way that affects the sustainability and functioning of the firm in the long run. The concepts of job attractiveness, job effort and a balanced corporate life play the roles of catalysts and mediators in increasing the level of psychological capital in the firm.

#### **4.1 Discussion**

Findings from this study seems to have many practical implications for the development and management of human resources' motivational propensities in today's workplace. Employees who

are more hopeful, optimistic, efficacious, and resilient may be more likely to “weather the storm” of the type of dynamic, global environmental contexts confronting most organizations today better than their counterparts with lower Psychological capital. Although continued investment in financial, human, and social capital is certainly necessary, it may no longer be sufficient in this environment. Initial utility analysis indicates that the investment in psychological capital may yield very substantial returns beyond the other more traditional forms of capital investment (Luthans et al., 2006; Luthans et al., 2007; Youssef & Luthans, 2017).

Besides investment in and development of overall human resources, another implication would be further focus on linking Psychological capital to how leaders impact their followers. For example, Avolio and Luthans (2006) proposed that leaders who are more authentic and transformational will have a more positive impact on their followers’ motivational tendencies. Indeed, the leadership literature is replete with discussions linking historical leaders with each of the components of Psychological capital, yet we are not aware of any research to date that has tested these relationships in combination as found in this study. Paralleling the work here, a great deal of the research on leadership has focused on correcting what’s wrong with leaders, as opposed to examining the degree of Psychological capital associated with effective leaders.

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The study concludes that psychological capital can moderate the effect of employee engagement on employee job performance. Individuals who have a positive psychological state and initiative in making changes in their work environment will feel more engaged to their work. In line with this, the results of research on employees show a correlation between work engagement and psychological capital and job performance.

The future research can be expanded on the following three aspects: first, explore the relationship between work engagement and job performance in the context of group, and consider the influence of group characteristics, such as collective psychological capital. Secondly, longitudinal research can be used to confirm the causal effect on the development of employee psychological capital and the improvement on employee performance. Finally, qualitative research can be used to explore the theoretical model of the impact process on how psychological capital can buffer the negative impact of excessive work engagement and how to improve job performance, and lay a foundation for future research in this field.

### **6.1 Recommendations**

The study makes some recommendations for managers to increase employees' job performance by raising their psychological capital and employee engagement. Although positive psychological capital is a new concept to many managers, they should consider psychological capital as a resource that helps upgrade both job satisfaction and job performance of employees. Understanding psychological capital, developing a questionnaire to measure its level following the characteristics of work, business industries, carrying out annual evaluation, convening short-term psychological training courses for employees, are some initiatives to managers. Besides, in the effort of enhancing employees' job performance, managers are advised to effectively execute two-way internal communication activities to make employees' needs, working goals, and assigned work at the personal level mixed match.

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