

more, customers see their input making a difference (becoming more loyal in the process), and the company's bottom-line performance improves (as measured by important metrics such as sales, share, and profitability). That said, the key is having sales professionals who are trusted by both customers and internal constituencies (e.g., product managers and design staff) alike. And when credible sales professionals can accurately relay customer preferences in ways that lead to product changes, everyone wins. After all, when customers get what they want—products that are better, faster, cheaper, easier to use, and so on—they are more likely to keep buying from a company over the long haul.

*Source:* Joshi, A. W. (2010). Salesperson influence on product development: Insights from a study of small manufacturing organizations. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(1), 94–107.

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## Psychological Strength Training: Can it Help Employees Enhance Their Well-Being?

*Research Brief by William S. Weyhrauch, graduate student at Kansas State University, and Satoris S. Culbertson, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Kansas State University*

**H**ave you ever felt emotionally exhausted at work, without a scrap of positive feelings about the future? Perhaps you felt bogged down by the struggles of fighting bureaucratic red tape and unexpected hassles from management. And have you ever felt frustrated that people around you didn't seem to be experiencing the same exhaustion, even though they had to deal with the same hassles and organizational obstacles? Or, alternatively, perhaps you know of individuals who seem to lose sleep and worry over the same work issues that you simply take in stride—and you have no idea why they react so differently.

A new line of research in psychology may shed some light on these issues and offer explanations. According to Conservation of Resources Theory, people's psychological health and well-being may

be dependent on a limited stock of psychological resources that can be built up and stored over time for use in overcoming obstacles and meeting goals. In essence, some people have a large stockpile of these psychological resources. However, others do not—and their well-being and performance may consequently suffer.

In a recent study, James Avey (Central Washington University) and his colleagues Fred Luthans, Ronda Smith, and Noel Palmer (all from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln) proposed that a set of psychological variables known collectively as Psychological Capital (PsyCap) may play an important role in employee well-being over time. These variables include efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience.

Efficacy refers to having the confidence to put forth the effort needed to succeed at challenging tasks. Optimism involves making positive assumptions about present and future events. Hope refers to perseverance toward goals and, when necessary, adjusting paths to goals. Finally, resilience is the ability to sustain effort and bounce back in the face of obstacles and adversity. Researchers have established that PsyCap is not merely an arbitrary collection of positive-sounding buzzwords. Collectively, these four variables have been linked to performance outcomes. Moreover, because all can be enhanced in individuals, they are attractive to management as targets for employee well-being interventions.

Because PsyCap has previously been linked to several employee attitudinal, behavioral, and performance outcomes, Avey and his colleagues believed that it might also be relevant to occupational health psychology. In their study, Avey and his colleagues attempted to establish a link between PsyCap and employee psychological well-being, which is defined as a relative presence of positive feelings and emotions combined with a relative absence of negative feelings and emotions. It is a subjective, static experience—meaning that people are well to the extent they believe they are, and this feeling of well-being can fluctuate over time.

Avey and his colleagues used an online survey to reach 280 employed adults (average age roughly 32). These employees completed a measure of PsyCap and two separate measures of well-being: an Index of Psychological Well-Being (IPW) and

a General Health Questionnaire (GHQ). As expected, Avey and his colleagues found that PsyCap was positively related to both measures of well-being, meaning that people high in efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience reported more positive feelings of psychological health. Moreover, although the two measures of well-being were related, PsyCap was a better predictor of scores on the IPW than on the GHQ. Avey and his colleagues speculated that this may be due to the IPW's greater focus on emotional health and the GHQ's focus on cognitive health.

In addition, Avey and his colleagues were interested in examining the effect of PsyCap over time. By taking measurements of psychological well-being at two separate times, three weeks apart, they were able to confirm their expectation that PsyCap would predict changes in well-being at a later time. This longitudinal evidence suggests a causal relationship between levels of PsyCap and subsequent psychological well-being. That said, Avey and his colleagues were careful to note that without an experimental design causation cannot be inferred with any certainty. Avey and his colleagues also observed that future research in this area should examine other predictors of psychological well-being, particularly the effect of group-level resources, such as social support and group membership, over and above individual-level resources such as PsyCap.

Nevertheless, a crucial element in terms of thinking about the implications of this research has to do with the state-like nature of PsyCap. Compared to something that is more trait-like, or stable (e.g., a personality characteristic), PsyCap has been shown to be malleable. This opens the door to growth for the individual. It also opens the door for management to the extent that they can help individual employees foster that growth. Indeed, a positive relationship between PsyCap and employee well-being strongly suggests that organizational interventions geared to developing efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience should lead to more psychologically healthy employees. Naturally, this can pay important dividends for the organization given the connection between increased employee well-being and key behavioral and performance outcomes.

Avey and his colleagues further note that PsyCap

interventions should require a relatively minimal investment in time and money. Cost considerations, of course, are particularly crucial in a turbulent economy that threatens funding for employee health programs. Short, focused training interventions that can be administered in a variety of cost-effective ways (e.g., via computer programs) make PsyCap an inexpensive strategy for the maintenance, if not improvement, of employee well-being—ultimately the leverage firms need to meet their organizational challenges.

Overall, the study conducted by Avey and his colleagues suggests that management should consider “psychological strength training,” for lack of a better term, for employees. Their findings suggest that efforts in building psychological resources may enhance well-being, bringing the improved organizational outcomes that managers covet. Helping employees bolster or maintain their feelings of efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience will keep their psychological resources strong. And that will help them conquer the organizational obstacles they face on the job without succumbing to feelings of psychological exhaustion and despair.

*Source:* Avey, J. B., Luthans, F., Smith, R. M., & Palmer, N. F. (2010). Impact of positive psychological capital on employee well-being over time. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 15*, 17–28.

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## Eye of the Beholder: Does What Is Important About a Job Depend on Who Is Asked?

*Research Brief by Angela R. Connell, graduate student, Kansas State University, and Satoris S. Culbertson, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Kansas State University*

**W**hat competencies would you say are most important for performing your current job? Would your boss agree? And how about your subordinates: Do you think they would agree with your assessment of what's most important for job performance? Moreover, would the gender of your