

THE VIEWS OF ACADEMIC STAFF ON PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN TURKEY

Rana Özen Kutanis
Sakarya University
Faculty of Management

Emre Oruç*
Sakarya University
Institute of Social Sciences
Management and Organization of
Science

ABSTRACT

Based on positive psychology, positive organizational behavior movement which focuses positive behaviors rather than negative behaviors and positive psychological capital which is accepted as the implementation of positive organizational behavior in organizations have emerged in recent years. The studies on psychological capital are mostly based on quantitative methods and focus the outcomes of the construct. Therefore, qualitative studies need to be conducted to have a deep understanding of positive psychological capital. This study aims to determine which components of positive psychological capital the academic staff focus on and to what extent they give importance to the construct.

Key words: Positive psychological capital, self-efficacy, hope, optimism, psychological resiliency

1. Introduction

The need for employees to adapt changing environmental conditions, to improve themselves and to increase the competitive advantage of organization has led to recent developments in organizational behaviour field. In this sense, positive psychological capital has emerged, based on positive organizational behaviour which enables organizations to adopt a new perspective (Kutanis & Oruç, 2014: 154).

Beyond human and social capital, psychological capital presents a comprehensible theoretical framework to understand the value of human being by focusing on psychological capacities of individuals in organizational psychology. Incorporating these capitals into organizations synergically is important in actualizing human potential (Luthans, et. al., 2006: 21).

This construct which has been handled by Luthans and colleagues in 2000s hasn't been investigated widely in Turkey. The findings in the literature show that psychological capital has a negative relationship with employee absenteeism, deviance behaviour, turn-over intention, stress; a positive relationship with organizational commitment, job satisfaction, positive emotions, citizenship behaviour, work performance, employee performance and authentic leadership (Erkmen & Esen, 2012: 97). Although these studies focus on the outcomes of psychological capital, there have been few studies to examine antecedents of the construct in detail. In this study, it is aimed to determine which components of positive psychological capital the academic staff focus on and to what extent they give importance to the construct.

2. Positive Psychological Capital

Positive psychology was based on the studies of Maslow in the chapter "towards positive psychology" of the book *Motivation and Personality* in 1960s. After becoming the president of American Psychology Association, Seligman's studies have led to positive psychology movement (Wright 2003: 437; Seligman, 2002: 3). Seligman and colleagues emphasize the fact that healthy individuals need positive psychology to be happier, more productive and actualize their potentials (Luthans, et al., 2006: 9). These

*corresponding author

studies examining how to increase the human potential in positive psychology have resulted in positive organizational behaviour movement which investigates the organization with this perspective. Positive organizational behaviour differs from other positive approaches to organizations in that it examines developable and open-to-research psychological capacities (Luthans & Youssef 2007: 326). In this frame, As the result of Luthans et al. (2007: 549) studies on finding a construct that meet positive organizational behaviour criteria, positive psychological capital which includes self-efficacy, hope, optimism and psychological resiliency components have emerged.

Luthans, et al. (2006: 20) defined psychological capital as positive and developmental state of individual. Positive psychological capital deals with 'who you are' and more importantly 'who you are becoming' (Luthans et al., 2004: 46). It is also focuses on strenghts of individuals and characteristics which can be changed and developed as a result of experience and training (Luthans & Youssef 2007: 326).

Positive psychological capital is showing self-confidence in the face of challenging tasks (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998: 66), showing perseverance to attain goals and reconsider the ways to goals when it is needed (Snyder, 2002: 249), having positive beliefs to succeed in the future (Tiger, 1971: 18) and being resilient against the challanges (Benard, 1993: 44).

Consisting of self-efficacy, hope, optimism and psychological resiliency components, psychological capital is more than sum of the components (Avey, et al., 2008b: 55). These components represent a motivational tendency to accomplish tasks and goals which is a common characteristic for the four components (Avey, et al., 2008a: 705; Luthans, et al., 2007: 549).

2.1 Self efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as organizing the behaviours to attain goals and believing one's abilities to accomplish these goals (Bandura 1986: 391). It is also refers to managing actions and tasks successfully in the future and believing the possibility of accomplishing (Gardner & Pierce, 1998: 50).

Bandura (1997: 42) asserts that self-efficacy is a context-specific capacity. In other words, self-efficacy of leaders and employees can be improved in specific situations and tasks. Bandura (1995: 3) mentions four source of self-efficacy:

- 1) Mastery Experiences
- 2) Vicarious Learning
- 3) Social Persuasion
- 4) Physical and psychological readiness

Individuals with high self-efficacy persevere to succeed and they believe to be successful (Avey, et al., 2008b:54). Therefore, employees with self-efficacy obtain successful outcomes when they put in sufficient effort. On the other hand, employees with low self-efficacy tend to give up easily (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998: 66).

2.2 Hope

Hope is defined as finding alternative ways to attain goals and motivating yourself in using these ways. This component is associated with positive psychologist Synder's studies. According to Snyder (2002: 249-252), hope has primary components as *to be agency, pathways, and goals* which means it is a cognitive activity including goal directed energy, pathways to be successful and will power.

Hope, handled as a capacity improving thinking process of individuals has been a topic in a great deal of investigations (Snyder, 1994: 2). While Snyder develops his hope theory, he assumes that individuals are goal-directed and they put in effort to accomplish some outcomes in his hope theory (Luthans, et al., 2010: 44).

Hope is also important in crisis and organizational change in organizations. Employees with hope enable the organization to bounce back in challenging times (Avey, et al., 2008b: 53). Snyder (2000: 310) argues that it is less possible for hopeful individuals to experience negative situations such as uncertainty and weaknesses. Additionally, some studies show that individuals with high hope levels experience higher job satisfaction, performance and organizational commitment and lower turn-over intentions (Peterson & Luthans, 2003: 26).

2.3 Optimism

Optimism theoretical background as a positive organizational capacity is based on positive psychologist Martin Seligman's studies (Luthans et al., 2008: 222). According to Seligman (1998: 43), optimism is defined as an explanation style in which individuals attribute positive events to permanent and general situations; negative events to temporary and specific situations. Optimism is a capacity reflecting individuals' positive expectations in the future. As optimists anticipate good things, pessimists anticipate bad things to happen (Carver, et al., 2010: 879-880; Carver & Scheier, 2002: 231). On the other hand, optimism is defined as explanation of events in terms of self-wellbeing and happiness (Tiger, 1971: 18).

Carver & Scheier (2002: 235) point out that optimists strive to succeed against negative situations. On the contrary, pessimists do not expect positive outcomes even if they put in effort. Therefore optimists tend to be more successful than pessimists. Seligman (1998: 15) expressed optimism as "*learned optimism*" by focusing the developable nature of this capacity. Similarly, Carver & Scheier (2002: 240) support the idea that optimism can be developable with some interventions.

2.4 Psychological Resiliency

Benard (1993: 44) defines resiliency as an ability to bounce back against challenges. Luthans (2002: 702) asserts that resiliency is also bouncing back during positive changes, development and increasing responsibility. Accordingly, resiliency is not only coping with negative situations but also positive ones as well.

The distinctive characteristic of resiliency from other capacities is that it requires reactive and proactive behaviour against negative events. Resiliency in terms of reactivity accepts the idea that negative events and challenging tasks including positive ones have destructive effect on even the individuals with high optimism levels. Therefore, individuals need to bounce back after they go through challenging times. In terms of proactivity, resiliency means that negative events are opportunities for individuals (Youssef & Luthans, 2007: 779-780).

Benard (1993: 44) states that resilient individuals have social, problem solving abilities and autonomy. Besides, they have future plans and goals. Employees having these characteristics tend to bounce back easily against stress, burn-out, unemployment in organizations. Resiliency is argued to be changed and developed by some environmental factors (Stewart, et al., 1997: 22). Consequently, psychological resiliency is state-like capacity like the other capacities.

3. Methodology

3.1 Reserch Design

This study is a case study which is one of the qualitative research designs. Qualitative research is the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 1998: 37). Case study is a research design in which one or more events, settings and groups and related systems are examined in detail (Büyüköztürk et al., 2011: 273). This design is selected to have a deep understanding about psychological capital. Another factor in choosing a qualitative approach is that there are few qualitative studies on psychological capital.

3.2 Participants

The participants of the study consist of 20 academic staff in a public university in Marmara Region of Turkey. As a sampling method, *quota sampling*, which a non-random sampling method was used. In this sampling method, after stratification factors are identified which are thought to be relevant to the survey, the survey samplers themselves choose the participants (Neuman, 2007: 322). Therefore, 4 professors, 4 associate professors, 4 assistant professors, 4 lecturers, 4 research assistant were included in the study to determine the differences between the academic titles. Also, 50 % of the participants are females while the rest is male.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected with focus group interview and observations. Participants were separated into 2 homogenous and 2 heterogonous groups. Focus group interviews aim to reveal different point of views as a result of in-group interaction and to increase the reliability of themes occurred in different groups (Patton, 2002: 202). Additionally, heterogonous groups enabling diversity in groups help to collect richer data (Bogdan ve Biklen, 2007: 109).

In focus group interviews, two scenarios were used to collect data. The participants were asked to evaluate the scenarios. The scenerios reflecting core capacities of the psychological capital (self-efficacy, hope, optimism, resiliency) were made up in the light of theoretical background. Focus group interviews lasted 45 min. and the data were recorded by a tape recorder.

3.4 Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyse the data collected. First, the data recorded were transcribed into paper. Then the data were coded by two researchers to increase the reliability of the research. Reliability = Consensus / Separation of Consensus + X 100 formula was applied to the codings (Miles and Huberman, 1994:64). Correspondence percentage were calculated as %80. The percentage of correspondence %70 or higher is seen to be sufficient in terms of reliability. The codes as sub-themes were categorized into four themes, which have a theoretical background.

4. Results

The data collected from the academic staff were categorized into four themes, which were core components of psychological capital. Based on the theoretical framework, sub-themes are created under each theme.

Table 1. Self-efficacy theme and sub-themes

Self-efficacy	n	%
Responsibility	34	26,5%
Self confidence	29	22,6%
Taking initiative	14	10,9%

Sense of self	14	10,9%
Success	13	10,2%
Professionalism	11	8,6%
Experience	6	4,7%
Manifesting yourself	5	4%
Idealism	2	1,6%
Total	128	100 %

The data on self-efficacy theme has 9 sub-themes of 128 responses. The sub-themes emphasized by the participants are having responsibility (26,5%), self-confidence (22,6%), taking initiative (10,9%), sense of self (10,9%), success (10,2%), professionalism (8,6%), experience (4,7%), manifesting yourself (4%) and idealism (1,6%).

Table 2. Optimism theme and sub-themes

Optimism	n	%
Positivity	43	64,1%
Work ownership	7	10.4%
Loving one's job	7	10.4%
Agreeableness	4	5.9%
Feeling empathy	3	4,5%
Motivation	2	2,9%
Trusting others	1	1,5%
Total	67	100 %

In the theme of optimism, 7 sub-themes of 67 responses were obtained. The sub-themes under optimism are positivity (64,1%), work ownership (10.4%), loving one's job (10.4%), agreeableness (5.9%), feeling empathy (4,5%), motivation (2,9%), trusting others (1,5%)

Table 3. Hope theme and sub-themes

Hope	n	%
Goal-directedness	37	36,2%
Planning	22	21,5%
Pathways	12	11,7%
Agency	10	9,8%
Self disciplined	10	9,8%
Well adjusted	8	7,8%
Unifying	3	2,9%
Total	102	100 %

102 responses were obtained in the optimism theme. 7 subthemes emphasized by the participants are goal directedness (36,2%), planning (21,5%), finding alternative pathways to goals (11,7%), agency (9,8%), self disciplined (9,8%), well adjusted (7,8%) and unifying (2,9%)

Table 4. Psychological resiliency theme and subthemes

Psychological Resiliency	N	%
Seeking solutions	48	39%
Perseverance	33	26,8%
Resiliency against challenges	16	13%
Hardworking	13	10,5%
Devoted	11	8,9%
Calm	2	1,6%
Total	123	100 %

In psychological resiliency theme, 123 responses were categorized into 6 sub-themes. The sub-themes are seeking solutions (39%), perseverance (26,8%), resiliency against challenges (13%), hardworking (10,5%), devoted (8,9%), calm (1,6%).

It was observed that academic staff who were professor, associate and assistant professor emphasized self-efficacy theme more compared to research assistants and lecturers. On the other hand, academic staff didn't differ in evaluating the other themes in heterogonous groups. Lastly, there is no difference between males and females in evaluating all of the themes.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to determine which components of positive psychological capital the academic staff focus on and to what extent they give importance to the construct. According to the results, it can be seen that the participants emphasize self-efficacy component distinctively. Besides, the academic staff focused responsibility sub-theme of self-efficacy component compared to the other sub-themes. They also stress self confidence, success and experience sub-themes notably. The other sub-themes included in the study are taking initiative, sense of self, professionalism, manifesting yourself and idealism.

Studies on self-efficacy show that individuals with high self efficacy have sense of responsibility, self-confidence as a result of mastery experiences. This capacity is defined as one's having confidence in accomplishing a task in the future. Self efficacy which is context specific construct enables individuals to perceive themselves efficient (Bandura (1995: 3). Therefore, individuals should be provided with experiences in which they can accomplish their goals, observe role models and get social support (Avey, et al., 2008b: 54). It is showed that employees with high levels of self efficacy accomplish their goals when they put in enough effort (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998: 66).

In optimism component, the academic staff focused on the positivity compared to other sub-themes. Also, the other sub-themes are work ownership, loving one's job, agreeableness, feeling empathy, motivation and trusting others. The studies on optimism argue that optimists have positive expectations and motivate themselves against challenges. According to Seligman (1998: 43), optimism reflects individuals' positivity for the future. Consequently, optimist employees maintain their motivation even if they encounter some challenges in organizations.

In the hope theme, goal directedness is the most remarkable sub-theme for the academic staff. The other sub-themes attracting the participants' attention are planning, finding alternative pathways to goals, agency, self disciplined, well adjusted and unifying. As hopeful individuals are goal directed, they persevere to succeed (Luthans, et al., 2010: 44). Additionally, they focus on finding pathways to goals and having agency. According to Snyder (2002: 249-252), hope consists of pathways and agency. The individuals with high levels of hope have the ability to find alternative ways and the expectation to accomplish their goals (Avey, et al., 2008b:53).

Lastly, the academic staff emphasize seeking solutions for resiliency component distinctively. Also, perseverance, resiliency against challenges, hardworking, devoted and calm sub-themes are mentioned by the participants. Benard (1993: 44) defines resiliency as the ability to bounce back against challenging situations. In organizations, resiliency is not only coping with negative situations such as conflict and failure but also positive ones such as increasing responsibility and organizational change as well.

Future studies on psychological capital can conduct research designs with different qualitative data collection methods. Additionally, the studies can handle different sectors cross-sectionally to get a deep understanding the psychological capital construct.

References

- Avey, J. B., Luthans, F. ve Mhatre, K. H. (2008a), "A call for longitudinal research in positive organizational behavior", *Journal Of Organizational Behavior*, 29 (5), pp 705-711.
- Avey, J. B., Wernsing, T. S. ve Luthans, F. (2008b), "Can positive employees help positive organizational change? impact of psychological capital and emotions on relevant attitudes and behaviors", *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, , 44 (1), pp 48-70.
- Bandura, A. (1997), *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*, Freeman, New York.
- Bandura, A. A. (1995), "Exercise of personal and collective efficacy in changing societies". A. Bandura (der.), *Self-efficacy in changing societies içinde*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-45.
- Bandura, A. (1986), *Social foundations of thought and action*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Benard, B. (1993), "Fostering Resiliency in Kids", *Educational Leadership*, 51 (3), pp 44-48.
- Bogdan, R.C. ve Biklen, S.K. (2007), *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.), Pearson Education, Boston.
- Büyüköztürk, Ş., Kılıç Çakmak, E., Akgün, Ö., Karadeniz, Ş., Demirel, F. ve Yılmaz, S. (2011), *Bilimsel Araştırma Yöntemleri*, Pegem Akademi, Ankara.
- Carver, C. S., Scheier, M. F., ve Segerstrom, S. C. (2010), "Optimism. *Clinical Psychology Review*", 30 (7), pp 879-889.
- Carver, C. S. ve Scheier, M. S. (2002), "Optimism". C. R. Snyder ve S. J. Lopez (der), *Handbook of positive psychology içinde*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. pp. 231-243.
- Coleman, D. (1995), *Emotional İntelligence*, Bantam Books, New York.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998), *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, CA.
- Erkmen, T. ve Esen, E. (2012), "Psikolojik sermaye konusunda 2003-2011 yıllarında yapılan çalışmaların kategorik olarak incelenmesi", *Mustafa Kemal Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 9 (19), pp 89-103.
- Gardner, D. G., ve Pierce, J. L. (1998), "Self-esteem and self-efficacy within the organizational context: An empirical examination", *Group & Organization Management*, 23 (1), pp 48-70.

- Kutanis, R.Ö. ve Oruç, E. (2014), "Pozitif örgütsel davranış ve pozitif psikolojik sermaye üzerine kavramsal bir inceleme", *The Journal of Happiness & Well-Being*, 2 (2), pp 145-159.
- Luthans, F., Avey, J. B., Avolio, B. J., & Peterson, S. J. (2010), "The development and resulting performance impact of positive psychological capital", *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 21 (1), pp 41-67.
- Luthans, F., Norman, S. M., Avolio, B. J. ve Avey, J. B. (2008), "The mediating role of psychological capital in the supportive organizational climate: Employee performance relationship", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29 (2), pp 219-238.
- Luthans, F., Avolio, B. J., Avey, J. B. ve Norman, S. M. (2007), "Positive psychological capital: Measurement and relationship with performance and satisfaction", *Personnel Psychology*, 60 (3), 541-572.
- Luthans, F. ve Youssef, C. M. (2007), "Emerging positive organizational behavior", *Journal Of Management*, 33 (3), pp 321-349.
- Luthans, F., Youssef, C. M. ve Avolio, B. J. (2006), *Psychological capital : developing the human competitive edge*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Luthans, F., Luthans, K. W. ve Luthans, B. C. (2004), "Positive Psychological Capital: Beyond Human and Social Capital", *Business Horizons*, 47 (1), pp 45-50.
- Luthans, F. (2002), "The need for and meaning of positive organizational behavior", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 23(6), pp 695-706.
- Miles, M. B. ve Huberman, M. A. (1994), *An expanded sourcebook qualitative data analysis*, Sage Publications, London.
- Neuman, W. L. (2007), *Toplumsal Araştırma Yöntemleri*, Yayın Odası, İstanbul.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002), *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Peterson, S. ve Luthans, F. (2003), "The positive impact of development of hopeful leaders", *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 24, pp 26-31.
- Seligman, Martin, E. P. (2002), "Positive Psychology, Positive Prevention, and Positive Therapy". C. R Snyder ve S. J. Lopez (der), *Handbook of Positive Psychology içinde*, USA:Oxford Univ. Press, pp. 3-9.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (1998), *Learned optimism*, Pocket Books, New York.
- Snyder, C. R. (2002), "Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind", *Psychological Inquiry*, 13, pp 249-276.
- Snyder, C. R. (2000), *Handbook of hope*, San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Snyder, C. R. (1994), *The psychology of hope: You can get there from here*, Free Press, New York.
- Stajkovic, A. D. ve Luthans, F. (1998), "Social cognitive theory and self efficacy: Going beyond traditional motivational and behavioral approaches", *Organizational Dynamics*, 26, pp 62-74.
- Stewart, M., Reid, G. ve Mangham C. (1997), "Fostering children's resilience.", *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, 12 (1), pp 21-31.

Tiger, L. (1971), *Optimism: The Biology of Hope*, Simon & Schuster, New York.

Wright, T. A. (2003), "Positive organizational behavior: An idea whose time has truly come", *Journal Of Organizational Behavior*, 24 (4), pp 437-442.

Youssef, C. M. ve Luthans, F. (2007), "Positive organizational behavior in the workplace: The impact of hope, optimism, and resiliency", *Journal of Management*, 33, pp 774-800.