INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL ON WOMEN'S WILLINGNESS TO LEAD

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) characterized by its dimensions of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism (HERO) on women's attitude towards and willingness to take up leadership. Data for the study was collected from 76 women in various stages of their career. Results of the study found significant association between the respondents' PsyCap and their willingness to accept leadership positions. PsyCap dimensions of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism were also found to be associated with women's attitude towards gender stereotyping of leadership. Women with higher levels of psychological capital were more likely to accept that gender does not influence an individual's ability to be a leader nor does it affect their effectiveness in that role. Among the dimensions, efficacy was found to be the major predictor of women's willingness to lead.

Keywords: psychological capital (PsyCap), hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism, leadership

INTRODUCTION

Women's representation in senior management and leadership positions around the world is still low, despite the presence of equal employment opportunity legislation and diversity, equity and inclusion policies at the workplace. Harvard Business Review has discontinued the five-year

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practice of rating the top CEOs around the world due to lack of diversity in the ranking ("Why We've Stopped Ranking CEOs," 2020). Of the 100 CEOs ranked in 2019 from S&P 1200, only four were women ("The Best-Performing CEOs in the World, 2019," 2019). This statistic exhibits that although women have made significant progress in the corporate world, women leaders remain the exception rather than the norm in top leadership positions. The current covid-19 crisis has witnessed the exodus of women from the workforce restricting their ability to progress in their career as they take on traditional roles full-time as nurturers and caregivers in their homes ("Coronavirus and Gender," 2020). The current article aims to understand the barriers to women leadership in organizations.

PsyCap or psychological capital has been found to influence positive work-related behaviours, attitudes and leadership (Caza et al., 2010; Woolley et al., 2010). As the construct is considered state-like, and as a result malleable (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017), it is hoped that the strengthening of this construct in women would lead to willingness to seek promotional opportunities at work. Hence this article also seeks to study whether psychological capital influences women's attitude towards seeking leadership in order that the strengthening of this psychological construct would enhance women's willingness to actively pursue higher ranking positions at work.

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN CORPORATE INDIA

The liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991 witnessed a macrolevel change as more women entered the workforce. Indian women had made major strides in professional clusters like engineering, content production, data and artificial intelligence indicating the smaller gender gap in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) higher education (Schwab et al., 2019). However, this is at variance to the 66% literacy rate of women across India which is significantly lower when compared to a literacy rate of 82% among men (Schwab et al., 2019). The denial of formal education prevents the development of women leadership, as schools provide

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opportunity to cultivate leadership capabilities and reinforce gender equality (Hirudayaraj & Doshy, 2018; Sperandio, 2000).

Despite women making up 48% of the total population of 1.380 billion (Statistics Times, 2020), their representation in the workforce is only 27% (PTI, 2019). The Gender Gap Index 2020 which ranks countries based on gender-based disparities places India at rank 112 among 153 countries (Schwab et al., 2019). Although women in India are politically empowered (Rank 18), when ranked on the subindex of Economic Participation and Opportunity, India's ranking slips in ranking to 149, while Indian women are ranked 112 based on Educational Attainment. As per the report the economic opportunities for women in India is severely limited and this number dwindles further in top positions as their representation there is only 8.9%. In a report by Catalyst (Shyamsunder et al., 2015), representation of women at the entry level is 24%, first-level managers is 21%, senior-level management is 19% and top-executive level is 14%.

The report (Shyamsunder et al., 2015) further states that women are not benefitting from general talent development programmes conducted by organizations as these are targeted at developing existing leaders, majority of whom are men. Also the decrease in the number of women in top positions is also attributed to the trade-off that women have to make with marriage and motherhood (Smetana et al., 2018; Srinivasan et al., 2013). Stereotyping of roles in organizations based on gender and discomfort with reporting to a woman supervisor further hinder women's advancement. Unconscious gender related biases result in women being perceived as being less effective and less career oriented, resulting in women not receiving the credit that is due for their work (Desvaux et al., 2017).

The barriers for women's progress to top positions are, "(1) balancing work and home, (2) anytime, anywhere performance model, (3) lack of pro-family policies, (4) absence of female-role models, and (5) women's reluctance to promote themselves (6) women deciding to opt out of the workforce (Sussmuth-Dyckerhoff et al., 2012)". Studies have found that women are as ambitious as men in the profession, however their confidence in reaching top positions is significantly lower at 58%, in comparison to 79% for men. Hence fewer women (24%) believe that if they aspire for top executive position, they will become one. This lower confidence level also means that fewer

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women are likely to seek promotion. The study also states that women believe that their leadership style is less suited for their organization, and so they are likely to be unsuccessful in such a position (Desvaux et al., 2017), as a result, women are less likely to put themselves forward when presented with an opportunity in their organizations. This indicates the necessity of organizational and social intervention for facilitating women leadership.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AND ITS STATE-LIKE NATURE

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is a higher order construct in positive psychology conceptualized and operationalized by Luthans et al. (2004) that characterizes the psychological identity of an individual going beyond economic, social and human capital. PsyCap has been defined as

> "an individual's positive psychological state of development and 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 (resiliency) to attain success" (Luthans et al., 2007).

The four first-order resources of PsyCap namely, hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism (HERO) lead to positive appraisal of situations and are instrumental in providing the motivation to persevere in the pursuit of difficult goals (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Studies on the antecedents of PsyCap have found individual, job and organizational characteristics are significant predictors of the construct. Personality traits such as proactive personality and core-self evaluations have been found to influence PsyCap (Avey, 2014) . It was also found that job characteristics such as task characteristics, job design and nature of supervision affects the psychological capital of an individual (Avey, 2014; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Leadership styles and the presence of supportive organizational climate can strengthen an

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individual's PsyCap (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). However age and gender did not produce a significant variance in PsyCap, indicating that demographics do not play a significant role in the prediction (Avey, 2014; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017, p. 17). Literature also suggests that first-order variables of efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience characterize leadership development (Ledesma, 2014; Luthans et al., 2003; Maulding et al., 2012; Murphy & Johnson, 2016; Propst & Koesler, 1998).

STUDY

Participants

76 working women in various stages of their career were selected based on convenience to participate in the survey. The data collection was done from Tirupur which is considered a textile producing hub in India and from Chennai, a large metropolitan city in the country. The age of the respondents ranged from 19 to 46. Data was collected from the participants through Google forms.

Measures

Psychological Capital – PsyCap was measured using PCQ-24 developed by Luthans et al. (2007). Permission was sought from the authors of the scale through the Mind Valley website so that their PCQ-24 scale could be used for research. Studies from across the world with different populations have found PCQ-24 to be a reliable and valid measure of psychological capital. In the current study, the measures of PsyCap dimensions Hope, Efficacy, Resilience and Optimism reported reliability scores of.93,.94,.77 and .87 respectively. The reliability for the global measure of PsyCap was .97.

Willingness to Lead – The respondent's willingness to lead and attitude towards leadership was measured using 6 items, where respondents were asked rate the statements based on a 5-point Likert scale, stating their level of agreement or disagreement. Willingness to lead was measured using statements like *"I seek out leadership opportunities", "I actively pursue learning and*

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professional growth opportunities", "Independent of my job title, I am a leader in my organization", etc. These 6 items reported a reliability of .88.

RESULTS

The statistical analyses performed on the study variables of PsyCap and willingness to lead among women indicates a strong positive correlation. This correlation exists both between the global construct of PsyCap as well as its dimensions of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism. Multiple regression analysis results indicate that hope and efficacy are significant predictors of willingness to lead.

Table 1 containing the descriptive statistics shows that the measures used for operationalizing willingness to lead, psychological capital and its dimensions of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism are reliable as the Cronbach's alpha values are > .7. The table also presents a positive correlation between the variables as the correlation coefficients are >0.5.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability and Correlations of Dimensions of PsyCap Scale and Subscales with Measure of Willingness to Lead

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	α	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Hope	6	3.51	1.04	.93	1.00					
2	Efficacy	6	3.54	1.01	.94	.867**	1.00				
3	Resilience	6	3.32	0.71	.77	.827**	.786**	1.00			
4	Optimism	6	3.43	0.57	.87	.819**	.802**	.790**	1.00		
5	Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	24	3.45	0.77	.97	.957**	.943**	.906**	.900**	1.00	

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6	Willingness to Lead	6	3.39	0.93	.88	.845**	.894**	.762**	.757**	.888**	1.00

*p<0.05. **p<0.01

The correlation analysis performed between the study variables indicate high levels of correlation between PsyCap, its dimensions of Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, Optimism and a respondents Willingness to Lead. As can be seen from Figure 1 there is a strong positive correlation between the variables.

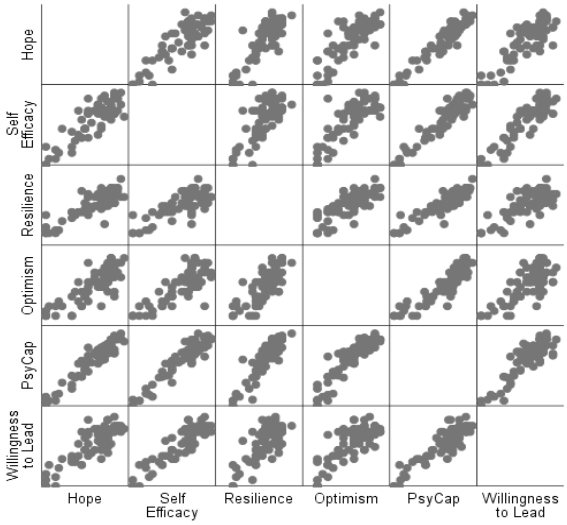

Figure 1 Willingness to Lead as a function of PsyCap and its Dimensions

The results of the multiple regression analysis for determining the variance explained by the variables is shown in Table 2.

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Table 2 Regression Analysis Summary for PsyCap Variables Predicting Women's Willingness to Lead

Variable	B	95% CI	β	t	p
Efficacy	.576	[.380,.957]	.631	5.851	.000
Hope	.224	[.012,.435]	.250	2.106	.039
Resilience	.082	[-.171,.335]	.063	.648	.519
Optimism	-.006	[-.322,.310]	-.004	.037	.970

Note. R2 = .81 (N = 76, p<.001). CI = Confidence interval for B

Multiple regression analysis conducted to isolate the significant predictors of willingness to lead among the PsyCap dimensional first-order variables indicated that efficacy and hope explained 81% variance. Here efficacy was the major predictor explaining nearly 80% variance in willingness to lead. Hence women's willingness to lead can be written as a function of efficacy and hope. From the results of the multiple regression analysis, it can be inferred that in order to enhance women's willingness to lead, organizational and social interventions should be aimed at improving their efficacy and hope.

CONCLUSION

Studies on the influence of diversity and inclusion policies have shown that, there is a positive association between the degree of workforce diversity and organizational performance, as indicated by financial performance and level of innovation. Organizations with women representation in management outperform organizations with a lack of gender diversity. Hence there is an organizational stake in promoting women to leadership positions. This study has shown that there is a need for developing women's psychological capital in order for them to aspire for

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top positions. Organizations have to create an environment which is gender-sensitive so that women can gain leadership efficacy. If such environments are created, then women leaders will be the norm rather than the exception, creating a virtuous cycle of women leaders who shall be precedents for future leaders.

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