

## Capitalizing constructs of positive organizational behaviour in workplace during challenging time

<sup>1</sup>Das Jayati, <sup>2</sup>Dr. Shamshuddin Shaik

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, <sup>2</sup>Faculty of Management,

GITAM Institute of Management, GITAM Deemed to be University, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India

Email: <sup>1</sup>jtids89@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Organizations across globe have witnessed unprecedented challenges due to onset of pandemic which have affected the way organizations work and overall functioning of the workforce. This study tries to provide a general idea of Positive Organizational Behaviour based on the existing literatures and theories and suggests to leverage the empirically established framework of Positive Organizational Behaviour and Psychological Capital in workplace during the challenging time for positive outcome. The author examines POB, related constructs and application of self-efficacy/confidence, optimism, hope and resilience, the psychological resources for sustainable organizational outcome during difficult time. Role of leadership process and dimensions of resilience have been emphasized for positive organizational outcome.

**Key Words:** Positive Organizational Behaviour, Psychological Capital; Resilience; Authentic leadership

### 1/ INTRODUCTION:

The crisis of 2020 pandemic and impact on organizations calls forth some parallel with the famous theory of Charles Darwin, British biologist cum naturalist which summarizes that organisms best adjusted to their environment are the most successful in surviving and human being did not evolve in a single day but evolved through the years to reach the present structure. The phrase “survival of the fittest”, which was first coined by Herbert Spencer, the English Scientist cum Sociologist and not by Darwin is at times misunderstood. Although the phrase evokes an image of a “violent struggle for survival”, in reality the word “fittest” does not mean the strongest or the most aggressive, rather it may suggest the attribute of coping and adaptation. In the midst global pandemic, new arrangements and adjustment in organizations have shaken many norms and protocols of corporate culture including unprecedented surge in the use of digital technology for maintaining a collaborative workspace. In the midst of this change and to continue with overall functioning of organization, several adjustments were institutionalized during this period. For moving forward at this juncture, some of the human attributes and capacities which seem to be important for functioning of the organization, concept of positive organizational behaviour qualifies to provide clarity and direction in this context. The theory of positive organizational behaviour is drawn from positive psychology movement which has been developed during late 90s. This idea emphasizes to optimize human functioning by focusing attention to the strengths and other positive characteristics of individual rather than dysfunctional sides of individual for maximizing human potential during the period of crisis. Although POB is relatively new field, its core ideas are based on positive psychology movement initiated by Martin Seligman and his colleagues (1998, 2003 & 2006). Based on Gallup organization’s strength-based research and emphasis on strengths in the workplace, Fred Luthans (1999) has conceptualized his theory on positive organizational behaviour by integrating positive psychology to the organizational context. POB deals with implications of positive psychology for organizational behaviour (Luthans, 2001, 2002a,) and leadership (Hodgetts & Luthans, 2002; Luthans & Stankovic, 2003).

Key criteria which differentiate POB from other positive approaches are:

- The POB construct is grounded on empirical research.
- It has reliable and valid measures and are not based on popular concept without much research back up.
- The POB criteria are state-like i.e., open to learning, change and development as opposed to trait-like which are relatively fixed across situations and time.
- POB can be managed for performance improvement is another criterion which also distinguishes it from other positive organizational literature. POB is concerned with workplace and applications of its resource capacity to improve human performance including employees, managers and leaders.

- POB constructs are micro, individual level construct whereas other positive approaches (Judge, Erez, & Bono, 1998; Judge & Bono, 2001) are macro level of analysis.

## 2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The objective of the study is following:

- To provide an overall idea about the concept and theory of POB
- To describe dimensions and importance of Positive Organizational Behaviour and its related constructs that are conceptualized by various researchers especially Fred Luthans in the field of Organization Behaviour.
- This study aims at finding out the major outcome of leveraging POB resources and how application of this resources in workplace will be beneficial for organizational leaders, its team and for the overall organization in difficult situation and crisis.
- This study also summarizes moderating role and importance of leadership in POB in organizational set up and beneficial side of authentic leadership.

## 3. METHODOLOGY:

This paper is based on literature review of theories and studies related to the field of Positive Organizational Behaviour for developing in depth understanding, gaining insight and understanding of the phenomena through study of supportive findings and data. It is a qualitative study and no quantitative methods have been administered by the author in this case. The findings which are presented in this study is based on studies of other prominent authors/researchers.

## 4. LITERATURE REVIEW:

POB (positive organization behaviour) is a young yet robust construct and has its origin from positive psychology. The concepts and foundation of POB acknowledge contribution of Maslow (1971), Bandura (1997) and Selye (1975), Lazarus (2003) and Nelson and Simmons (2005). POB is concerned with individual psychological qualities, its positive impact on quality of life both personal and professional. Mission of POB includes employee happiness and health (Wright, 2003) and also performance improvement even during the time of crisis. Fred Luthans, the father of positive organizational behaviour (POB) argued that the criteria for POB are measurable, developmental and manageable for performance impact in the workplace. The definition of POB in his (Luthans, 2002, p. 59) own words is “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”. The theory of POB has incorporated ideas from some of the existing OB theories including attitudes, personality, motivation, and leadership but the uniqueness of POB is that is a measurable construct which can influence a demonstrated contribution to performance improvement (Luthans, 2002, 2003). It is believed that OB specialists are more focused on identifying and amending the managerial and employees’ dysfunctional side and flaws in the organizations through theories of motivation, attitude, conflict, communication, decision making, leadership, power, group, managing conflict and stress neglecting the brighter side (Maslow, 1954) of human behaviour. The studies of organization are primarily dominated by negative assumption and bad management theories (Ghoshal, 2005). POB theory offers to correct this trend as Luthans (2002) provides ideas and framework for taking a positive approach which is built on employee strengths. He suggests that OB can draw from its own strengths and research-driven approach that can then be translated, applied, and sustained for effective practice and these strengths are psychological capital or psychological capacities of confidence (self-efficacy), hope, optimism and resilience.

### **POB (Positive Organizational Behaviour) and POS (Positive Organizational Scholarship)**

POB primarily deals with human strengths and psychological capacities which can be developed with an objective for enhancing workplace performance (Luthans, 2003). POS on the other hand, is concerned with processes which have more stable or trait-like qualities (Cameron et al., 2003; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003) such as “Big Five” personality dimensions which are very stable, fixed, very difficult to change. In particular, POS focuses on processes such as excellence, thriving, flourishing, abundance, and growth, which are considered to be dynamically unfold and develop over much longer periods of time. In POB, the importance on performance improvement is key parameter, but that is not the case with POS. Finally, POB studies are based primarily at the micro and meso levels of analysis, whereas POS studies are usually conducted at the organization-level (Luthans & Avolio, 2009a, 2009b; Luthans & Youssef, 2007).

### Constructs of Positive Organization Behaviour and Psychological capital

Luthans (2004) proposed four psychological capacities or resources that fulfil the characteristics of POB: hope, self-efficacy, optimism and resiliency.

**Hope** has been defined by positive psychologist C R Snyder (1994) as a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals). Hope can be developed through goal-setting training (Snyder, 2000) and has been found to positively relate to health (Simmons et al., 2003) and performance (Luthans, 2002; Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2007). Although hope is yet to be included in mainstream organizational behaviour literature, several POB studies have found that employees’ level of hope are related to their job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work happiness and performance (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). In workplace, difficult and robust organizational goals can be broken down into more manageable smaller goals to enhance hope (Gupta, Singh and Bhattacharya 2012).

**Self-efficacy** refers to an individual's belief or conviction (or confidence) in his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources and courses of action needed to successfully executive a specific task within a given context (Bandura, 1986; Stajkovic & Fred Luthans, 1998) and is related to leadership effectiveness (Luthans et al 2001) creativity (Tierney & Farmer, 2002), decision making (May et al., 2003; Nilsson Schmidt & Meek, 2002) and work- related performance (Bandura & Locke, 2003). According to Bandura (1997), sources of self-efficacy beliefs are mastery (performance accomplishment), vicarious learning (self-modelling), persuasion (encouragement) and psychological and physical arousal (emotional state).

#### Process of self-efficacy

According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy represents task-and situation-specific cognition whereas general efficacy is a trait and relatively stable over time and across situations. Individuals with high self-efficacy manage stressful situations with confidence and are able to resist stressful reactions whereas individual with low self-efficacy tend to experience stress and burnout because they expect failure.

#### Implications of Efficacy in the Workplace

Efficacy training and development can have considerable impact for employee performance and stress management. A study of meta-analysis ( Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998) suggests that self-efficacy in workplace represents a greater average gain (28%) in performance than other popular organizational behaviour interventions such as goal setting (10.39%), feedback (13.6%), organizational behaviour modification (17%), personality traits (e.g. the “Big Five”) and relevant attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction or organizational commitment). The results reveals a highly significant .38 weighted average correlation between self-efficacy and work-related performance. The study also indicates a highly significant ( .38 weighted average) correlation between self-efficacy and work-related performance. Leadership efficacy has a strong impact on followers, their commitment and performance.

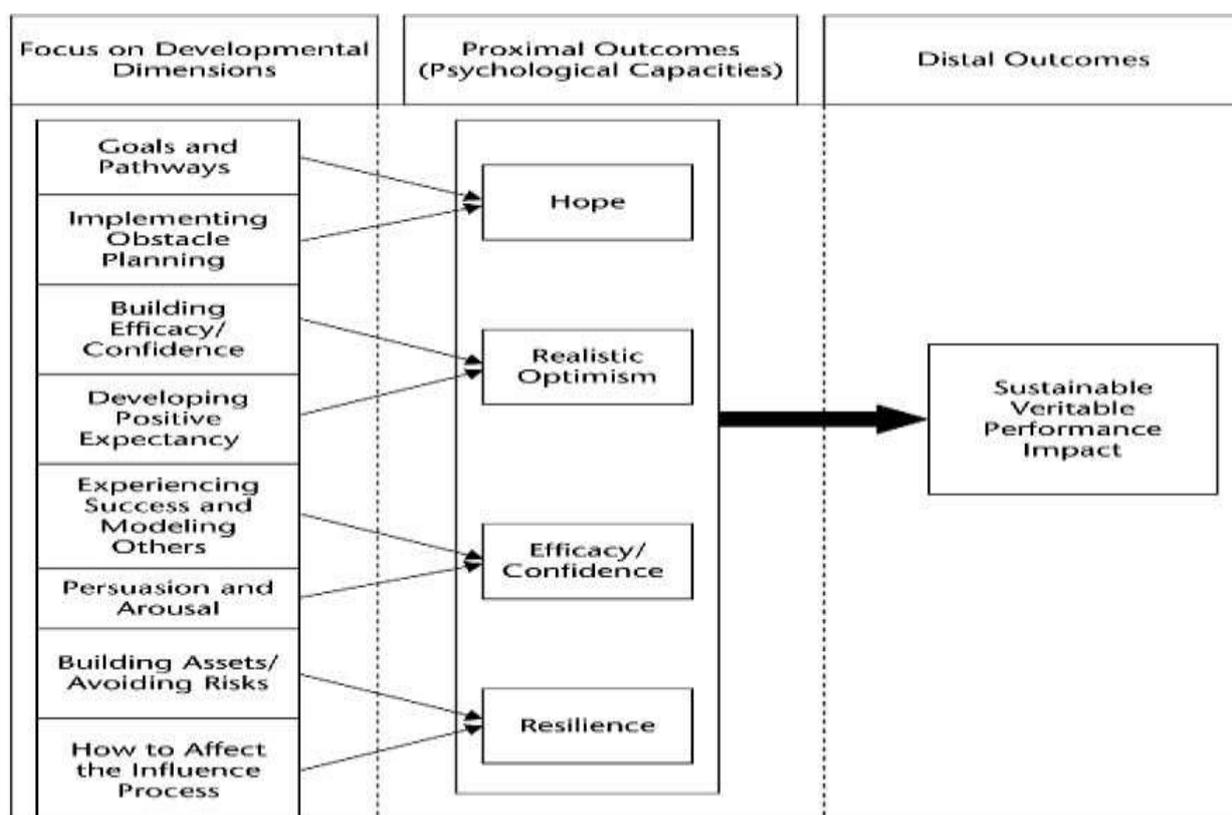


Diagram source: F Luthans, J B Avey, B V Avolio, S M Norman and G J Combs, 2006; "Psychological capital development; toward a Micro-intervention." *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, Vol 27, pp387-393

Leaders can influence subordinate's efficacy perceptions through mastery experiences, vicarious learning and positive feedback (Bandura, 1997). Observing exemplary behaviours and PsyCap strengths in leaders and on receiving criticism and feedback from them in a positive way, followers can develop higher confidence to pursue desired goals (Rego et al, 2012).

**Optimism** is an attributional style in which positive events are portrayed through personal, permanent and pervasive causes whereas negative events through external, temporary, and situation-specific causes (Seligman, 2006). The other researchers (Carver et al, 2010, 2014) with the expectancy theoretical perspective suggested that optimists are people who expect good things to happen to them and pessimists expect bad things to happen to them. Seligman (1990).

**Optimism in workplace:** Optimism is a positive force with attributes of high morale and aspirations in workplace and act as motivator to work harder and stretching goals (Luthans et al, 2002, 2007). In certain functional area of organization including sales, product design, public relation, customer service and especially in health sector optimist would be undoubtedly valuable (Luthans, 2007). By expressing confidence on subordinates' abilities, leaders and supervisors can influence employees to re-direct their focus on the positive aspects of things and available opportunities rather than negative aspect and negative events (Gupta et al, 2001). Despite being a positive force in workplace, in certain cases optimism may lead to dysfunctional outcomes. According to Peterson (2000) optimistically driven behaviour may lead to pointless pursuits or unrealistic goals. Realistic optimism would result in more effective leadership than false optimism.

**Resilience** is reactive rather than proactive in nature. In POB, resilience is defined as "a class of phenomenon characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk" (Masten & Reed, 2002, p75). As a component of POB, resilience is viewed "as the capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, failure or even positive events, progress and increased responsibility (Luthans, 2002)". The "bouncing back" capacity involves flexibility, adjustment, adaptability and continuous responsiveness to change and the uncertainty. It can be developed in the workplace through using one's assets i.e., knowledge, skills, abilities, personality traits, or social relationships to handle risks i.e., stress, conflict, or job insecurity (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). Through resiliency, individuals view adversity as a learning experience.

### Measuring Resilience in Workplace

Rees et al (2015) proposes that resilience is measured from a multi-level perspective which includes a variety of components. Windle et al (2011) proposed name of some components such as optimism, self-esteem, personal competence, social competence, problem-solving skills, self-efficacy, social resources, insight, independence, creativity, control, hardiness, family cohesion, spiritual influences, and initiative to characterize resilience.

Mallak, L.A. & Yildiz, M. (2016) developed Workplace Resilience Instrument (WRI), a model which comprises of four factors i.e., Active Problem-Solving, Team Efficacy, Confident Sense-Making, and Bricolage.

**Active Problem-Solving:** An active approach to problem-solving demonstrates a real need to do something positive, rather than merely talking about the problem or hoping it will go away. In organizational context, this capacity enables employees to focus on the problem instead of worrying about why things aren't going well.

**Team Efficacy:** A resilient individual has a systemic understanding of how the team operates and achieves its objectives. A resilient individual discusses team member roles with other team members. Goals are made known and shared with everyone on the team and, in turn, guide each team member's actions.

**Confident Sense-Making:** The ability to extract order out of chaos and assessing and accessing the right resources quickly is a key factor in workplace resilience and this type of behaviour led to innovations in organization. Confident sense-making enables the individual to filter out unnecessary signal and information quickly to focus on the relevant stimuli for decision making and action.

**Bricolage:** In the book "The Savage Mind" (1962), the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss used the word "bricolage" to describe the skill of using whatever is at hand and recombining them to create something new. Bricolage is concerned with creating solutions out of whatever is available and how an individual reacts in an extreme situation and crisis. When confronted with chaotic, extreme, and dangerous situations, the resilient individual takes intelligent risks and reflects on how to stop think, observe, and plan.

Findings of the study of Mallak, L.A. & Yildiz, M. (2016) establishes that there are statistically significant differences between males (range: 0.15 to 0.20) and females (range: -0.03 to -0.04) with respect to each of the WRI's factor scores and gender. This finding also shows males scoring higher as a group than females on the resilience factors.

Resilience Principles (Larry Mallak, 1998) summarizes on adaptive as opposed to programmed responses. These principles should help organizations to adopt tangible steps towards becoming more resilient:

Principle	Putting the Principle to Work
1) Perceive experiences constructively	1) Even if the experience causes pain, find the positive angle and move forward.
2) Perform positive adaptive behaviours	2) Perceive change as opportunity, not danger. Allow responses to adapt to the needs of the situation, rather than execute ineffective “programmed” responses.
3) Ensure adequate external resources	3) Ensure access to adequate resources to allow positive adaptive response to approach a wide variety of possible events.
3) Expand decision making boundaries	4) Provide greater decision-making authority to support positive adaptive response and the use of resources to achieve the objective.
4) Practice bricolage	5) Develop the ability to create solutions on the spot using materials on hand.
5) Develop tolerance for uncertainty	6) Develop the ability to make decisions with less than the desired amount of information.
6) Build virtual role systems	7) In a team, individuals have a shared understanding of the team’s mission and can fill in wherever needed to ensure smooth functioning of the team.

**Impact of POB in workplace supported by empirical studies:**

POB has positive correlation with desired employee attitudes, behaviours and performance. A meta-analysis (Avey, Reichard & Luthans, 2011) of 51 independent samples (representing a total of N = 12,567 employees) found strong, significant, positive relationship between PsyCap and desirable attitudes i.e., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, wellbeing and performance. Negative relationship with PsyCap was found with undesirable attitude e.g., cynicism, stress, anxiety and turnover intentions and behaviour.

There are several studies which established positive outcome of POB and Psychological capital in workplace. PsyCap is significantly correlated with OCB (Organizational Citizenship Behaviour) and contributes to improvement of the organizational climate (Suifan, 2016). Resilient individuals accept the reality and are better equipped to adapt to significant change (Masten 2001; Coutu 2002), emotionally stable ( Masten & Reed, 2002) and their coping abilities (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh & Larkin 2003) result in improved performance behaviour.

Kathrin Heinitz et al (2018) examined the longitudinal relation of optimism, hope and self-efficacy with subjective well-being and ill-being and tested the mediating effect of flexible goal adjustment. The results show a statistically significant positive effect of self-efficacy and optimism on subjective well-being as well as a statistically significant negative effect of optimism on depression.

Research findings (Motanpotra, 2019) in Indian context suggests that PsyCap is significantly correlated with OCB although the strength of the relationship is not high. ( $r = .11, p = .001$ ). Correlation matrix also suggests that PsyCap is negatively correlated to CWB (Counter-productive work behaviour) ( $r = -.16, p = .001$ ). PsyCap is significantly correlated to WE (Work Engagement) ( $r = .56, p = .001$ ) with all its dimensions having a correlation coefficient in the range of .30’s which suggests that PsyCap affects WE. PsyCap dimensions are significantly correlated with EL (Emotional labour) but strength of the relationship is not very high. ( $r = .15, p = .001$ ).

Another Indian research (Gutpa, 2014) concludes that POB construct based on PsyCap aids in the development of subordinate’s positive psychological capacities. Employees with higher psychological capital engage in greater creative behaviours and produce creative outcomes. Such employees need less supervision and are less dependent on leadership for direction and day to day work. PsyCap enhances exhibition of creative performance behaviour.

**Positive Leadership as one of the important contextual factors in POB**

Leadership is a crucial factor in organization and is an important moderating variable in the state-like capacities of POB and desired outcomes of the construct (Luthans, 2002). In this context, Whitehead (2013) emphasized the meaning of psychological capital as a form of developed psychological understanding of self and others. At an individual level, psychological capital is related to a better understanding of thoughts and emotions that shape personal behaviours. On the other hand, at a social level, psychological capital is related to “1) a better understanding of the role of others in shaping our feelings and actions, and 2) a renewed sense of appreciation of, and compassion towards, the psychological drivers behind the actions of others” (Whitehead, 2013).

Leadership is a positional attribute and positive leaders create positive workplace. Personal disposition of leaders is crucial to create a positive workplace and engaging workforce. Positive approach to leadership includes different types of positive leadership such as authentic, transformational, altruistic, ethical leadership, e-leadership and servant leadership. For the best interest of the topic only authentic leadership and e-leadership have been identified for discussion.

#### **Authentic leadership for creating a positive organization**

Luthans and Avolio (2003, 2004) introduced authentic leadership as a separate construct which promotes various positive organizational behaviors, which in turn enhance organizational performance (Yammarino, Dionne, Schriesheim, & Dansereau, 2008). Authentic leadership is “a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviours on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development. The authentic leader is confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, transparent, moral/ ethical, future oriented and gives priority to developing associates to be leaders” (Luthans & Avolio, 2009 p 243). It is linked to positive organizational outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior, organizational commitment, and follower satisfaction with supervisor, as well as follower job satisfaction and performance (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Similar to POB capacities or psychological capital (PsyCap), authentic leadership is considered to be state-like and open to development and change. This leadership theory (Luthans et al, 2007) is the first to treat leadership as both a developmental process and product centred on authenticity. The outcome of authentic leadership are positive psychological capital (efficacy, hope, optimism and resiliency) and transparency, moral/ethical behaviour, future-orientation, and building associates.

#### **E-leadership**

This leadership concept has emerged due to the extensive use of technology for social interaction among all members of a team and team leaders. Avolio et al. (2000) conceptualizes this phenomenon as e-leadership as leadership transmitted through advanced information technologies. Further, Avolio and Kahai (2003) suggests e-leadership as a technological means for leaders to achieve ends which were only possible in face-to-face situations earlier. This framework deals with how advanced information technology can influence and is influenced by leadership. The effects of information technology emerge from their interaction with organizational structures wherein leadership is a part. And in the process organizational structures, including leadership, may themselves be transformed as a result of interactions with advanced information technology. Virtual environment has the same basic responsibilities as face-to-face leaders, however, e-leaders (Cook, 2010), face added challenges such as monitoring from a distance, building teams from different cultures, motivating followers, answering queries, higher flexibility to meet rapid technological changes, and developing technical skills including learning for the use of technology to facilitate leadership. Additionally, enhanced communication skills are required to establish trust, closeness at the same time ensuring messages are not misconstrued. This requires more often communication, additional work and flexibility on the part of the leader. In the current scenario, e-leaders have a significant role in the development of relationship and trust in virtual teams.

### **5. FINDINGS :**

Among five assets financial, physical, market, operational and human, the most important for organizational profitability is the effective management of human capital (Hornstein et al, 2002) since the study demonstrated that there is a strong foundation that superior human capital strategies are reflected in valued firm-level outcomes. But the PsyCap is not just explicit knowledge, skills and abilities which simply can be built through education or through on-the-job experience and is thus beyond human capital. It is also above social capital i.e., those afforded by social relationships and networking across individuals, departments and organizations (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Coleman, 1988). PsyCap is more than an influential group of contacts or group of people with whom one has useful and functional relationships. Luthans (2007) explained that PsyCap goes beyond economic (i.e., physical and financial), social (inter-group, and interorganizational relationships, networks, norms etc) and human capital (knowledge, skills, abilities, experience) when challenged by unforeseen problem. Luthans and his colleagues (2004) suggest that it is necessary to adopt psychological capital management and development for gaining competitive advantages.

### **6. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION:**

Since several studies have empirically established that POB construct has positive correlation with desired employee attitudes, behaviours, performance and is an enabler for effective organizational change, the perspective should help in better understanding and managing of human resources. An understanding of positive psychological resources internal to the organization should be possible through measuring PsyCap capacities measurement of employees, managers, leaders in general and especially at the time of making crucial talent related decisions including hiring, promotion and succession planning. Several measurement tools have been developed by different researchers

to measure each sub constructs of PsyCap although the widely used measurement scale for POB has been made by Luthans et al (2015). Luthans's PsyCap questionnaire comprising of six items for each sub construct (six dimensions for each facet i.e self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience) with self-measure has shown good model fit through multiple confirmatory factor analysis in different organizational settings (Luthans & Avolio et al, 2007). This can be also used as tool to examine managerial competence and measuring leadership capabilities including authentic leadership and organizational climate. It offers an alternative or complementary view to common management assumption. Since POB based on positive psychological resource capacities can be measured and strengthened, the organizations can leverage competitive advantage through its people on effective application. During adversity and difficulty (current global pandemic for instance), PsyCap can provide agility to individual, team and organization for positive organizational change with the help authentic leadership.

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