

THE IMPACT OF STRENGTHS USE IN THE WORKPLACE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL (PSYCAP)

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The positive psychology and positive organizational behavior approach has grown rapidly in the last decade. This research was designed to find the relationship between strengths use and psychological capital (PsyCap). Survey questionnaires are administered to Indonesian employee, most of them in managerial level. After that, several simple regression procedures are performed. The main finding is that the strengths used among Indonesian manager is low. The low score can be attributable to the mindset dimension of strengths use. Other finding is that, although have a positive significant correlation coefficients with PsyCap, the strengths use in the workplace is a weak predictor of PsyCap. Some discussions about the findings and managerial implication is presented.

Keywords:

Strengths use, psychological capital (PsyCap), simple regression

I. INTRODUCTION

The world of psychology and organizational behavior is shifting, since Seligman's account about the need to rethink current psychological approach was presented in his article *Building Human Strength: Psychology's forgotten mission* (1998, p. 2). He proposed psychologists to come back to the original mission of psychology that not only study for damage, but also study for strength and virtue. Since then, many researchers and managers are trying to apply positive approaches in their relation to organization.

One of the subjects in positive psychology that bring a wide discussion among researchers and practitioners is positive psychological capital (PsyCap). Many researches have proved that high level of PsyCap among employee will lead to greater performance and satisfaction (Fred Luthan, 2007), so company must pay a great attention to this construct. PsyCap is considered a better approaches regarding its state-like characteristics that assuming dynamics in nature and its manageability. Although several factors such as authentic and transformational leadership (Fred Luthan, 2007) and appropriate training method (Fred Luthans, 2008) have been proved have a positive impact on PsyCap, other constructs may need to be explored.

This research will contribute to the attempt of finding construct that have an impact to PsyCap that meeting the criteria; can be assessed, developed and managed. The focus of this research will be the *use of strengths* in the workplace. The choose of this construct based on a research conducted by Buckingham (2007, p. 23) that shows most of American manager discuss performance of his/her subordinate in the negative way, which is the weaknesses of the subordinate. Only 25 percent say that they

talk about their strengths. It shows that the use of strength in the workplace is still not optimal.

In summary, this research investigates whether the optimal use of strengths in the workplace will have a positive impact on PsyCap.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Psychological Capital (PsyCap): Definition, Components, and Impact on Organization

Psychological capital has been defined as "an individual positive psychological state of development and is characterized by (1.) having confidence (*self efficacy*) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging task. (2.) making a positive attribution (*optimism*) about succeeding now and in the future (3.) persevering toward goal persevering toward goals, and when necessary, redirecting path toward goals (4.) when beset by problem and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (*resilience*) to attain success" (Fred Luthan, 2007, p. 542). Here we will break down the four components of PsyCap.

Self Efficacy defined as people beliefs in their capabilities to produce desired effects by their own action (Bandura, 1997 in C.R. Snyder, 2007). *Hope* is defined by Snyder (2007) as goal directed thinking in which the person utilizes pathways thinking (the perceived capacity to find routes to desired goals) and agency thinking (the requisite motivation to use those roads). *Optimism* then defined as using adaptive causal attribution to explain negative experiences or events.

Last but not least *Resilience* is defined as the psychological capacity to rebound from adversity, uncertainty, conflict,

failure, or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility (Fred Luthan, 2007).

The impact of PsyCap on organizational life is emanate. Several study that exploring the impact on Psycap to the organization come up with several result. Shamas-ur-Rehman Toor (2010) said that high level of PsyCap can help one cope with difficult time, especially in the situation after crisis. The impact of PsyCap also emerge in the area of leadership. Research by Toor and Ofuri (2010) shows that there is a positive correlation between PsyCap and authenticity of leadership. As a summary, psyCap have impact on financial and high return on investment (Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman, & Combs, 2006)

2.2 Strengths Use in Workplace

Several definitions have been developed since many years to explain personal strength concept. For example Linley and Harrington (2006, p. 86) in Wood et al (2011, p. 15) define strength as “a natural capacity for behaving, thinking, or feeling in a way that allows optimal functioning and performance in the pursuit of valued outcomes”. In simple words, personal strength is “A characteristics of a person that allow them to perform well or at their personal best” (Wood, Linley, John Maltby, & Hurling, 2011, p. 15). Meanwhile, Park, Peterson and Seligman (2004) define character strengths as “positive traits reflected in thought, feelings and behavior”. Another definition that has been taken into account is from Brdar and Kashdan (2010), “strength is pre-existing qualities that arise naturally, feel authentic, intrinsically motivating to use, and energizing, thereby increasing the probability of healthy outcomes”.

From those definitions above, we can draw the red line definition that strengths is natural characteristics or traits that

intrinsically calling, to accomplish goals in a certain way that likely to succeed and bring happiness to live.

The use of strengths has been topics of study for several years. It has been proved that the use of strengths lead to well being and organizational performance. The employee which has ability and opportunity to use his strengths in his job found to be more satisfied to his/her life (Brdar & Kashdan, 2010, p. 151) , less stress and greater self esteem (Wood, Linley, John Maltby, & Hurling, 2011, p. 15), and finally Clifton and Harter (2003) as cited by (Linley, Nielsen, Wood, Gillett, & Biswas-Diener, 2010) leads to greater job performance.

But despite a lot of work has been done, the understanding of how the mechanism of strengths use can lead to psychological benefit such as well being is still enigmatical. Peterson and Seligman (2005) as cited in (Linley, Nielsen, Wood, Gillett, & Biswas-Diener, 2010) argued that probably the relationship is lie on the intrinsic motivation build by employee when they use their strength. They said, “In fact, we are unaware of any published research specifically testing the mechanisms by which using strengths leads to positive changes in well-being”.

III. RESEARCH QUESTION , CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS

3.1 Research Question

This research want to answer question about is there any relationship between the use of personal strength and the degree of positive psychological capital (PsyCap) in the workplace. Since the optimalization of strengths in workplace is proved to have a positive correlation with well-being and well being is one indicator of

psycap, we can hypothesized that there will be a positive correlation between personal strength use and PsyCap.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

Personal strengths optimization that represent the use of personal strengths in work place will positively influencing four elements of PsyCap which is hope, optimism, resilience and self efficacy (Figure 1.).

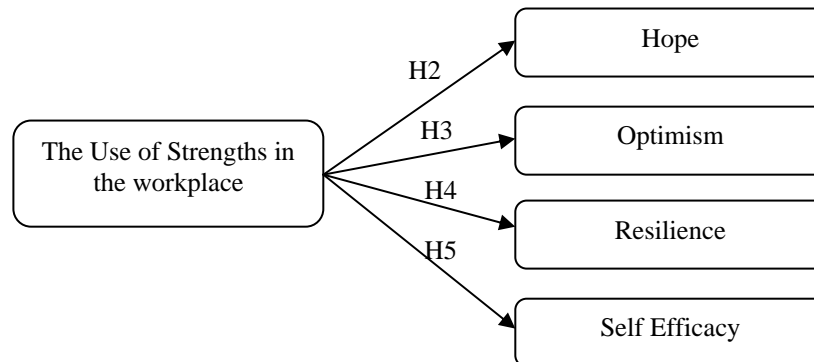


Figure 1.
Conceptual Framework

3.3 Hypothesis

- H1 : Employee who can use his/her strengths in workplace will have a higher positive psychological capital score
- H2 : Employee who can use his/her strengths in workplace will have a higher *hope* score
- H3 : Employee who can use his/her strengths in workplace will have a higher *optimism* score
- H4 : Employee who can use his/her strengths in workplace will have a higher *resilience* score
- H5 : Employee who can use his/her strengths in workplace will have a higher *self efficacy* score

IV. METHODS

To answer the research question, a survey has been conducted. Questionnaires administered to the participants of PPM-Manajemen public training which in general represent the employee. A total of 66 out of 100 training participants responded to the questionnaire. From those questionnaire collected, 6 were defect due to the large number of missing value and 60 were eligible for further data processing.

Questionnaire in Bahasa Indonesia is constructed based on previous study by Buckingham (2007), Luthan, Youssef and Avolio (2007). The use of strengths in the workplace, is adapted from the original Strength Engagement Track (SET) that developed by Buckingham (2007), consists of 16 questions about mindset, action and result of strengths use. Meanwhile, the positive psychological capital measure is adapted from original psychological capital

questionnaire (PQC) developed by Luthan, Youssef and Avolio(2007). Twenty four questions about *hope, optimism, resilience* and *self efficacy* is presented. The final part of the questionnaire is considered to identify the respondents profile. All measurements using 6-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 represent “*strongly disagree*” to 6 represent “*strongly agree*”.

From reliability analysis we eliminate 8 questions of SET measures and 4 questions of PQC resulting appropriate

cronbach alpha level for all variable. Factor analysis procedure is performed to analyze the validity of the measurements. One questions in SET and 7 question in PQC is delete to enhance the validity of the instruments.

The detailed alpha score and factor analysis loading that presented in table. 1 below, shows that the instruments is good enough and can be used for further analysis.

Table 1.
Reliability Analysis Result for SET and PQC measures

Variable	Number of Original Questions	Number of Reliable and Valid Questions	Cronbach Alpha Score	Factor Analysis Loadings
SET	16	7	0.638	>0.535
PQC – Hope	6	3	0.719	>0.738
PQC - Optimism	6	3	0.742	>0.672
PQC – Resilience	6	2	0.516	>0.635
PQC – Self Efficacy	6	5	0.826	>0.635

V. RESULTS

5.1 Respondents Profiles

Respondents of this research come from various position, job area, education and company background. They also varied in terms of age and length of joining current

organization. Most of the respondents have a bachelor degree, from local company, from a marketing area and currently managerial position (GM, manager and supervisor). The detailed respondents profiles can be shown in Table 2. below.

Table 2.
Respondents Profiles

Respondents Profile (in Percent)							
Position		Job Area		Company Status		Education	
General Manager	1.7	Marketing	50.0	State Owned	15.0	High Schools	18.3
Manager	34.5	Finance	3.3	Local Company	50.0	Bachelor	63.3
Supervisor	22.4	HR	11.7	Government	6.7	Master/Doktor	6.7
Staff	31.0	Operation	13.3	Foreign Investment	10.0	Others	6.7
Others	10.3	General	3.3	Foreign Institution	3.3		
		Others	16.7	Others	6.7		
Mean Age : 32.8 years, std dev : 6.8							
Mean Length of work in curent company : 7.5 years, std dev : 7.3							

In brief, the composition of respondents is varied enough to represent the variance in the population, especially to approach employee in the managerial level.

5.2 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis is performed to gain the general description of the data

presented. First, the mean and standar deviation analysis of all variable is counted, after that cross tabulation and ANOVA procedure is applied to check the relationship between strengths use and psycap mean and respondents profile data. Mean value and standard deviation can be seen in Table 3. below.

Table 3.
Descriptive Analysis for SET, and PQC measures*

No	Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Strengths use	3.7857	.61318
2	Aggregate PsyCap	4.7251	.45237
3	Hope	4.7292	.58638
4	Optimism	5.1556	.64211
5	Resilience	4.3167	.69482
6	Self-Efficacy	4.6992	.66323

* six-point likert scales ranging from 1 represents “strongly disagree” and 6 represents “strongly agree”.

From the table above we know that the strengths use score is low. It reflect that the use of strengths is still not optimal. The biggest contributor of the low score in

strengths use is question about strengths mindset. Detailed means for every questions on strengths use can be seen on Table 4. below.

Table 4.
Questions Mean of Strengths Enggement Measures

No	Strengths Enggement Questions	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Menurut saya menemukan kelemahan dan memperbaikinya adalah cara terbaik untuk mencapai kinerja tinggi organisasi	1.80	0.840
2	Saya sering merasa sangat bersemangat terhadap pekerjaan saya	4.75	0.876
3	Saya sering tidak sabar menunggu-nunggu hari masuk kerja ketika libur	3.72	1.180
4	Saya sering bekerja hingga lupa waktu	4.18	1.112
5	Saya sering mengeluh mengenai pekerjaan saya	4.32	1.033
6	Saya sering berpikir untuk mencari tempat kerja baru	4.07	1.326
7	Saya merasa pekerjaan saya ini belum ideal	3.67	1.217

From relationship test between strengths use and profile variable only education has significant different. The higher the education the less use of strength. Meanwhile, the correlation between age, length of work in current organization is insignificant. Meanwhile, psycap has a significant relationship with position in organization and job area. Analysis of variance shows that the higher the one's position in the organizational structure the higher the PsyCap. In addition, marketing and operational people have a higher psycap among others.

To answer the research question a simple regression is performed with PsyCap as the dependent variable and strengths use as the independent variable or predictor. After that, similar processes are applied to the other PsyCap variable to test the relationship between the strength use measure and each psycap component i.e hope, optimism, resilience, self efficacy. The final analysis is done by comparing the R^2 as measurements of the goodness of simple regression prediction power. The result of simple regression analysis can be shown in Table 5. below.

Table 5.
The Result of Simple Regression Analysis

Dependents Variables	Standardized Beta Coefficients	r	Adjusted R-squared	Significance
Psycap	0.425	+ 0.425	0.166	0.001
Hope	0.174	+ 0.174	0.030	0.183
Optimism	0.289	+ 0.289	0.068	0.025
Resilience	0.105	+ 0.347	0.105	0.007
Self Efficacy	0.362	+ 0.342	0.116	0.004

From the table 5 above, we know that the coefficient correlation of strengths use in the workplace positively correlates well with the positive psychological capital. In other word, the higher the strengths use, the higher the PsyCap, thus support the H1. The phenomenon is also occurring for the components of PsyCap. The PsyCap optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy have positive significant correlations. Only PsyCap hope that not correlates well with strengths use (sig. 0.183). in result, only H2 has been rejected.

Although there are positive significant correlation coefficients value between strengths use and PsyCap, the R-squared score for 5 dependent variables predicted by strengths use is relatively low.

The highest R-squared score was PsyCap as an aggregate variable, with R-squared of 0,166 which means that only 16 percent of variance in PsyCap can be explained by the use of strength in workplace. The R-squared score determine the goodness of regression equation in explaining dependent variable As a conclusion, the strengths use in the workplace is a weak predictor of psychological capital measured as aggregate as well as its separate individual component of hope, optimism, resilience and self efficacy.

VI. DISCUSSIONS

It has been showed that the use of strengths in the workplace among Indonesian

managers is still near to the ground. Improving weaknesses as the only way to get better performance still become the dominant mindset. The most possible explanation of the low score is that the bad news bombarding in the media and the commonly use weakness based language. The popular use of problem solving based tools such as problem brainstorming also reinforces the weaknesses mindset. This condition need to be taken notice regarding that the mindset can become a salient beliefs that drive attitude and lead to action (Ajzen:1991). So because the reason behind the lowest score of SET measures is in the mindset, then it reasonably conclude that the action and result dimension of SET will be depressed.

On the contrary we found surprisingly that the PsyCap score of Indonesian managers is relatively high. This fact shows that the positive state is there in the workplace. The high score of PsyCap probably attributable the tight competition in the job market so employee are relatively feeling lucky about having the job. This feeling can create positive PsyCap score due to be grateful. It raise the opportunity to gain more understanding about the grateful state that maybe another form of PsyCap. It align with Luthan, Youssef, and Avolio (2007) expectations, "We expect over the next several years to add to the list of current psychological capital constructs that end up representing one's overall amount of psychological capital".

The positive correlation between strengths use and aggregate PsyCap, optimism, resilience and self efficacy is quite understandable. But the question why hope does not have a significant correlation is difficult to answer. The best explanation of this phenomena is lay on the future characteristics of hope. Snyder, Irving, and Anderson (1991) as cited by Luthan, Youssef and Avolio (2007, p. 66) stated that there are

two components of hope i.e. *agency* or goal-directed energy and *pathways* or planning to meet the goals. This make hope is the only PsyCap that rely dominantly on what will happen in the future. Since the strengths use is based on present condition, than we can proposed that there won't be any correlation between them.

The low predictive capacity of strengths use to estimate aggregate PsyCap reflects that there many other variables that should be added to the prediction. Several factors that can be included to the model to improve the predictive capacity is the company intervention in micro level (Luthan, Youssef and Avolio:2007), and successful after-event review (Shmuel Ellis, 2006), Face-to-face and web-based training (Fred Luthans, 2008). The Leadership style than can impose PsyCap can also be added to enhance the prediction.

VII. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

When we accept that the PsyCap score is strongly related with well being, and well being lead to greater performance, then manager should pay more attention on developing PsyCap in the workplace. Although only has a small impact, strengths use can be perceived as enabler to developing PsyCap. Since the lowest score is contributed by the mindset element of strengths use, managers should design a campaign to inspire the worker about the strengths based activities. In order to ensure the campaign effectiveness, manager should consider the hierarchy of effect model of human responds that involves awareness-interest-desired-action sequence (Hawkins: 2006).

VIII. SUMMARY

This research shows that the strengths use score of Indonesian managers is low. The low score is contributed by the low score in mindset dimension of strengths use, in other words, Indonesian manager still not aware of strengths based orientation to accomplished activity goal in the workplace. Meanwhile the measurements of relationship between strengths use and PsyCap is not satisfactory so it will need a further

discussion to include other variables to enhance its predictive capacity.

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