



Reducing Interpersonal Conflict Among Information Technology Employees Through Psychological Capital Interventions (PCI)

¹Madiha Rehman, ²Asma Parveen

¹Research Scholar, ²Professor,

^{1,2}Department of Psychology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

Abstract: Interpersonal conflict can significantly reduce employee well-being, job satisfaction, and productivity at work (Spector & Jex, 1998). Conflict management is essential for preserving a positive work atmosphere and ensuring the effective delivery of IT services in the fast-paced, high-pressure industry of Information Technology (IT). In order to reduce interpersonal conflict among IT professionals, this study outlines a quick approach to apply Psychological Capital (PsyCap) Interventions within 5 weeks.

Objective: In order to minimize interpersonal conflict and psychcap within the IT department, the main goal of this study was to develop an expedited program that strengthens the psychological resources of IT staff, such as hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. To fulfill the objective Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale by Spector & Jex, 1998, and the Psychological Capital Questionnaire by Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007 were used.

Design: Within the 5 weeks, surveys conducted before and after the intervention assessed changes in PsyCap levels and initial perceptions of interpersonal conflict among IT employees.

The study's findings indicated that PCI served as a shield for IT employees and helped to reduce interpersonal conflict. The PCI program can help the organization by fostering a more upbeat, successful, and collaborative work environment.

Keywords: Interpersonal conflict, psychological Capital Intervention, and IT employees

I. INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal conflict is a frequent and inescapable occurrence in the workplace, particularly for IT professionals who frequently collaborate in teams and take on difficult and complex jobs. Interpersonal conflict can have a detrimental impact on a person's health, a team's performance, and an organization's efficiency. Therefore, it's critical to develop practical strategies for interpersonal conflict management, prevention, and resolution among IT staff.

Increasing the psychological capital (PsyCap) of IT staff is one promising strategy. PsyCap, also known as hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO), is a positive psychological state. These elements can be measured, developed, and managed for performance improvement since they are interconnected and mutually reinforcing (Luthans et al., 2007).

According to research, PsyCap has a number of advantages for both individuals and organizations. These advantages include raising job satisfaction, work engagement, creativity, productivity, and organizational citizenship behavior while lowering stress, burnout, turnover intention, and counterproductive work behavior (Luthans et al., 2015). Additionally, PsyCap has been discovered to be negatively related to conflict management styles that are harmful to conflict resolution, such as dominating, avoiding, and emotional expression, and positively related to styles that are conducive to positive outcomes, such as integrating, compromising, and obliging (Avey et al., 2010).

In order to improve IT employees' PsyCap and lessen interpersonal conflict at work, the major goal of this proposal is to develop and implement a psychological capital intervention (PCI).

Interpersonal Conflict: Rahim (2002) explained conflict as "an interactive process manifested in an incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities" (p. 207). Conflict may manifest either internally or externally due to divergent perspectives, ideals, or emotions held by two or more individuals. Conflict can be intensified by contrasting individual backgrounds, cultural differences, moral values, conceptual disparities, beliefs, and goals. Potential sources of conflict can arise from variations in individuals' personalities, encompassing disparities in attitudes, behaviors, and expectations for the job, as well as issues related to poor communication and organizational failures. Examples of conflict expression encompass several forms such as humiliation, reluctance to collaborate, oppression, and fury. According to a poll conducted by Mettl (2018), a business specializing in employee evaluation and talent measurement, a significant portion of managers' time, almost 40%, is dedicated to addressing interpersonal conflicts arising from inadequate conduct and misinterpretations. Approximately 20% of the time allocated to senior Human Resources (HR) executives is dedicated to legal proceedings, with a significant portion of these cases stemming from workplace conflicts.

Previous research has established a correlation between workplace interpersonal conflict and several undesirable outcomes. Interpersonal conflict inside the workplace has been found to be associated with heightened levels of anxiety, melancholy, impatience, and a greater inclination to leave one's job (Spector & Jex, 1998).

Psychological Capital

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) emphasize the necessity for research that focuses on human brilliance and positivity rather than merely mental illness and other weaknesses in a special edition of the *American Psychologist*. Their call to action sparked the "positive psychology" field of research, which swiftly spread to the workplace and other spheres of daily life (Cameron et al., 2003). According to Luthans and Youssef (2007), the focus of positive organizational behavior is on particular positive psychological resources that can be assessed, produced, and managed and have a demonstrable influence on performance and well-being. PsyCap is a multidimensional higher-order construct with roots in positive psychology and evidence-based management that dynamically combines four resources: hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2007).

Previous study has established a connection between psychological capital and workplace conduct. Previous research has indicated that individuals possessing a heightened degree of psychological capital have psychological resources that lead to favorable workplace behavior. The literature suggests a positive association between psychological capital and many outcomes such as enhanced devotion, improved performance, higher happiness, and enhanced well-being (Luthans et al., 2007). Avey et al. (2010) suggest that it has the potential to mitigate adverse workplace behaviors as well. When individuals engage in collaborative activities within groups or teams, it often leads to interpersonal conflict when disagreements arise.

Self-Efficacy: According to Stajkovic and Luthans (1998), self-efficacy is "one's conviction (or confidence) about his or her ability to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context" (p.66). According to Bandura (1998), "the foundation of action" is self-efficacy (p.52). It necessitates the individual's observation and self-reflection (Bandura, 1997). It is at the core of social cognitive theory, which contends that both internal agency and social learning have an impact on a person's development (Bandura, 2001). In order to promote self-directed activities and the pursuit of difficult goals, self-reflection on cause and effect relationships ultimately enhances self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Bandura, 1998; Bandura, 2001).

Hope: According to Snyder et al. (1991), the definition of hope is "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (1) agency- goal-directed energy and (2) pathways-planning to meet goals" (p. 287). Hope is a healthy state that demonstrates agency (willpower) and paths (waypower) in the achievement of objectives. According to Bandura (1998), agency is the conviction that one can affect behavior. When pursuing a goal, pathways require the capacity to come up with a variety of solutions and strategies to get around barriers. People who have hope adopt an "empowering way of thinking" by viewing their aims through the prism of success (Snyder, 1994, p.2).

Resilience: Resilience, as defined by Luthans (2002b), is "the capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, failure, or even positive events, progress, and increased responsibility" (p. 702). Resilience is the capacity to bounce back constructively after a bad event (Tugade et al., 2004). This suggests that resilience is not just getting back up after a setback, but also effectively responding to both positive and negative (though potentially difficult or overwhelming) circumstances, learning from them, and progressing through them. In other words, resilience entails not just returning to "normal" after a difficulty or setback but also achieving new levels of fortitude and development. The evaluation of risks, assets, and adaptational processes has an impact on resilience (Masten, 2001).

Optimism: According to Tiger (1979), optimism is a "mood or attitude associated with an expectation about the social or material future - one which the evaluator regards as socially desirable, to his advantage, or for his please" (p. 18). Positive events are attributed to personal, enduring, and pervasive causes while bad events are assigned to external, transient, and situational reasons (Buchanan & Seligman, 1995). Optimism is a learned mental process for understanding the causes of events. Positive events are attributed to internal sources for optimists, while negative events are attributed to external sources for pessimists (Seligman, 1998). This helps them distance themselves from the negative effects of positive events and take credit for positive events that cannot be changed or altered (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). Consequently, optimism is a trained, realistically optimistic evaluation of the causes of an event. In addition to this attribution viewpoint, optimism also refers to a generally favorable perspective with optimistic expectations for the future. To put it another way, optimists typically anticipate positive outcomes (Mens et al., 2016).

Psychological Capital Intervention

According to Luthans (2002a) resources for effective organizational behavior must be open to change. An essential distinction from many other positive psychology ideas is the need to be open to growth. According to Luthans and Youssef (2007), PsyCap occupies an intermediate "state-like" position on the trait-state continuum. Traits and trait-like constructs (for example, IQ and personality) are stable and difficult to change, whereas states (for example, emotions) are volatile and fleeting. State-like resources, on the other hand, such as PsyCap, can be produced through short interventions with reasonably long-term advantages (Luthans & Youssef, 2007; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Dello Russo and Stoykova (2015), for example, demonstrate the persistence of PsyCap development effects over time, supporting its state-like nature. This idea is further confirmed by a recent study by Corbu et al. (2021), which demonstrates that PsyCap considerably rose immediately following an effective microcoaching intervention and that the rise persisted for four months.

The effectiveness of PsyCap interventions is increasingly being supported by the available research (Dello Russo & Stoykova, 2015; Luthans et al., 2008; Luthans et al., 2010; Luthans et al., 2014; Stratman & Youssef-Morgan, 2019). The creation of PsyCap can be completed in a short amount of time with minimal costs (Luthans et al., 2006), and if done carefully, these interventions can have a favorable return on investment (Youssef-Morgan, 2014).

Because of the synergistic nature of the four positive psychological resources that comprise PsyCap, Luthans et al. (2006) created a template for psychological capital interventions (PCIs) that attempt to enhance these resources concurrently rather than one at a time. Positive psychological interventions in general have been demonstrated to be more effective when using this "shotgun" strategy (Seligman et al., 2005; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Participants in a normal PCI specify certain goals and subgoals. The objectives ought to be quantifiable, difficult, internalized, and portrayed as approach-oriented rather than avoidance-oriented. Participants go through a process of figuring out several ways to reach their objectives, dealing with any roadblocks, compiling a list of resources, and mentally rehearsing their journey. These activities increase the participant's resilience, optimism, self-efficacy, and hope.

Objectives

To assess the effectiveness of psychological capital interventions on interpersonal Conflict.

To assess the effectiveness of psychological capital interventions on psychological capital.

Hypotheses

H₁ There will be differences between pre and post-mean scores of interpersonal conflict.

H₂ There will be differences between pre and post-mean scores of psychological capital.

Methodology

The proposed Psychosocial Capital Intervention (PCI) was formulated by drawing upon the current body of literature and established methodologies for the development of Psychological Capital (PsyCap). The PCI encompassed three primary stages, namely assessment, training, and evaluation.

- 1. Assessment:** The initial stage encompassed the evaluation of the fundamental level of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and interpersonal conflict among IT professionals through the utilization of recognized measurement tools. The researchers employed the PsyCap Questionnaire (PCQ) as a means of assessing the four constituent elements of PsyCap, namely hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2007). The scale developed by Spector and Jex (1998) was utilized to assess interpersonal conflict within the working context, specifically among personnel in the IT industry. The examination additionally encompassed demographic factors, including age, gender, educational attainment, length of employment, and occupational position.
- 2. Training:** The subsequent stage entailed administering a (PCI) curriculum to cohorts of 28 IT employees for training purposes. The PCI program comprised of five sessions two-hour sessions, conducted on a weekly basis over a duration of five weeks.

Session 1: provided an introduction to Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and its potential benefits for both individual and corporate performance. The participants were educated on the precise definition and distinguishing features of each constituent of PsyCap, namely hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Additionally, they acquired knowledge of the many sources and procedures utilized in the development of each individual component. The participants engaged in a self-reflection activity to assess their present level of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and establish objectives for enhancing it.

Session 2: The Development of Hope. The participants acquired the ability to discern and determine distinct and formidable objectives that were congruent with their personal beliefs and interests. Additionally, the participants acquired the knowledge and skills necessary to develop various strategies in order to attain their objectives, as well as the ability to predict and address prospective challenges and corresponding solutions. The participants engaged in the application of hope theory to a personal or professional objective through the utilization of a worksheet.

Session 3: Development of Efficacy. The participants acquired knowledge and skills to improve their self-assurance in their aptitude for accomplishing things effectively. Additionally, the participants acquired knowledge on the utilization of four distinct sources of efficacy information, namely mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal. The participants engaged in the application of efficacy theory to a job of a personal or professional nature through the utilization of a worksheet.

Session 4: The Development of Resilience. The participants acquired the skills necessary to effectively manage and overcome adversity, as well as to recover and rebound from setbacks. The participants were also instructed on the utilization of three distinct tactics for the cultivation of resilience: positive framing, problem-solving, and social support. The participants engaged in the application of resilience theory to a personal or professional difficulty through the utilization of a designated worksheet.

Session 5: The Development of Optimism. The participants acquired the knowledge and skills necessary to embrace an optimistic perspective in both their personal lives and professional endeavors. The participants were also instructed in the utilization of three strategies for fostering optimism: explanatory style, positive affirmations, and thankfulness. The participants engaged in the application of optimism theory to a specific personal or professional scenario by utilizing a structured worksheet.

During each session, the facilitator employed a diverse range of instructional techniques, including lectures, films, case studies, discussions, role plays, feedback, quizzes, games, and exercises, with the aim of actively involving participants and augmenting their educational achievements.

In addition to the aforementioned activities, the facilitator also furnished participants with supplementary materials including articles, books, podcasts, websites, and applications that pertain to PsyCap and its constituent elements.

- 3. Evaluation:** The third phase encompassed the assessment of the efficacy of the PCI program in augmenting PsyCap and mitigating interpersonal conflict within the IT workforce. The post-intervention evaluation was completed using the same measurement scales as the pre-test, namely the PCQ 24 and the ICAWS. At the outset, there were a total of 31 employees who participated in the training program. However, throughout the course of the intervention, three individuals chose to withdraw from the program. Consequently, their respective data was excluded from the subsequent analysis.

Results and Discussion

Table 1

Mean, SD and t Value of Baseline and Post-intervention Scores of Employees With Respect to, Interpersonal Conflict and Psychological Capital its Dimensions

Variables	Baseline (n=28)		Post- intervention (n=28)		t (27)	95% CI of t LL, UL
	M	SD	M	SD		
ICAW	12.04	3.47	7.25	3.34	4.76	2.722, 6.849
PsyCap	139.21	24.86	210.50	16.42	34.11	8.95, 2.52
Self-efficacy	20.8	6.09	31.11	3.50	9.92	12.46, 8.19
Hope	19.25	6.04	31.4	3.13	14.22	13.90, 10.4
optimism	3.54	1.60	27.93	3.37	37.81	25.72, 23.07
Resilience	20.14	5.18	28.79	2.79	9.91	10.58, 6.71

Note. M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation; LL= Lower Limit; UP= Upper Limit; ICAW=

Interpersonal Conflict At Work; PsyCap= Psychological Capital

Table 1 presented the mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*) values for baseline and post-intervention scores of employees in two key variables: Interpersonal Conflict (ICAW) and Psychological Capital (PsyCap), including its dimensions: Self-efficacy, Hope, Optimism, and Resilience. Additionally, it provided the *t*-value, which is a measure of the difference between baseline and post-intervention scores.

The data showed a significant reduction in interpersonal conflict (ICAW) from baseline (*M* = 12.04) to post-intervention (*M* = 7.25). The $t(27) = 4.76, p < .001$, indicated that this decrease is statistically significant, suggesting that the intervention had a positive impact on reducing interpersonal conflict among employees. Hence, H_1 which stated that “*there will be differences between pre and post-mean scores of interpersonal conflict*” is accepted.

There is a substantial increase in Psychological Capital (PsyCap) from baseline (*M* = 139.21) to post-intervention (*M* = 210.50). The $t(27) = 34.11, p < .001$, indicated a highly significant improvement. This suggested that the intervention positively impacted employees' psychological capital, which encompasses self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Thus H_2 which stated that “*there will be differences between pre and post-mean scores of psychological capital*” is accepted.

Moreover, there is a significant increase in self-efficacy from baseline (*M* = 20.8) to post-intervention (*M* = 31.11), with a $t(27) = 9.92, p < .001$. There is a significant increase in hope from baseline (*M* = 19.25) to post-intervention (*M* = 31.4), with a $t(27) = 14.22, p < .001$. Moreover, there is a dramatic increase in optimism as well from baseline (*M* = 3.54) to post-intervention (*M* = 27.93), with a $t(27) = 37.81, p < .001$. Last dimension i.e., resilience increased significantly from baseline (*M* = 20.14) to post-intervention (*M* = 28.79), with a $t(27) = 9.91, p < .001$.

Across all dimensions of Psychological Capital (self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience), there are substantial increases post-intervention. These changes are statistically significant, indicating that the intervention had a positive and significant impact on all dimensions of psychological capital Which is consistent with findings earlier findings (Dello Russo & Stoykova, 2015; Luthans et al., 2008; Luthans et al., 2010; Luthans et al., 2014; Stratman & Youssef-Morgan, 2019).

Conclusion

The findings suggest that the intervention program was effective in reducing interpersonal conflict and significantly enhancing employees' psychological capital and its various dimensions. This is indicative of an improvement in employees' overall well-being, resilience, and positive psychological outlook following the intervention. These changes are likely to have positive implications for workplace performance and job satisfaction.

Firstly, there was a substantial reduction in interpersonal conflict (ICAW) among employees, indicating that the intervention successfully mitigated workplace conflicts. This is a promising outcome as reduced conflict can lead to a more harmonious and productive work environment. Employees exhibited substantial increases in self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. These dimensions collectively contribute to employees' mental and emotional resilience, which is crucial for coping with challenges and achieving higher levels of job performance and job satisfaction.

The improvement in psychological capital suggests that the intervention not only addressed immediate conflicts but also fostered a positive psychological climate within the workplace. This can have long-term benefits for both employees and organizations, including increased employee engagement, creativity, and overall well-being.

Limitations and Future Suggestions

The study had a relatively small sample size ($n=28$), which may limit the generalizability of the findings. A larger and more diverse sample would provide stronger external validity. Secondly, the study appears to evaluate the impact of a single intervention without a control group. Without a control group, it is challenging to establish causality definitively, as other factors may have contributed to the observed changes. Moreover, data relies on self-reported measures, which can be influenced by respondent biases, including social desirability bias. Future research could benefit from incorporating objective measures or multi-source assessments and longitudinal studies.

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