

STUDIES AND RESEARCHES

Psychological Capital and Well-Being: The Moderating Role of Psychological Detachment from Work

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Abstract

The current study contributes to the understanding of the moderating effect of psychological detachment from work during off-job time (i.e., switching off mentally) on the relationship between psychological capital and work engagement, and between psychological capital and burnout. Data were collected from 121 employees (48.8% women) who work in a multinational company in Romania. Hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression analyses, with work engagement and burnout as dependent variables. Psychological detachment from work during off-job time is an antecedent for dedication, but did not moderate the relationship between psychological capital and dedication. Additionally, psychological detachment moderated the relationship between psychological capital and cynicism. The implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords

psychological capital, psychological detachment, work engagement, burnout

Rezumat

Această cercetare contribuie la înțelegerea efectului moderator al detașării psihologice de locul de muncă în timpul liber (de exemplu, detașarea mentală) în relația dintre capitalul psihologic și implicarea în muncă, precum și între capitalul psihologic și epuizare profesională. Datele au fost colectate de la un eșantion de 121 de salariați (48,8% femei) care lucrează într-o companie multinațională din România. Ipotezele au fost testate folosind regresia ierarhică, implicarea în muncă și epuizarea fiind variabilele dependente. Detașarea psihologică de locul de muncă în timpul liber a prezis dedicarea, dar nu a moderat relația dintre capitalul psihologic și dedicare. În plus, detașarea psihologică a moderat relația dintre capitalul psihologic și cinism. În articol sunt discutate implicațiile teoretice și practice.

Cuvinte cheie

capitalul psihologic, detașare psihologică, implicare în muncă, epuizare profesională

Résumé

Cette recherche contribue à la compréhension de l'effet modérateur du détachement psychologique du travail pendant les loisirs (par exemple le détachement mental) dans la relation entre le capital psychologique et l'implication dans le travail, et entre le capital psychologique et l'épuisement professionnel. Les données ont été recueillies auprès d'un échantillon de 121 employés (48,8% de femmes) travaillant dans une entreprise multinationale en Roumanie. Les hypothèses ont été testées en utilisant une régression hiérarchique, l'engagement au travail et l'épuisement étant les variables dépendantes. Le détachement psychologique du travail pendant le loisir a prédit le dévouement mais n'a pas modéré la relation entre le capital psychologique et le dévouement. En outre, le détachement psychologique a modéré la relation entre le capital psychologique et le cynisme. L'article présente les implications théoriques et pratiques.

Mots-clés

le capital psychologique, le détachement psychologique, l'implication dans le travail, l'épuisement professionnel

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Nowadays, every organization strives to enhance the employee's well-being, but sometimes these efforts are not enough. Employee well-being is contingent on organizational factors, but also on personal resources, which are related to the employee's individual characteristics. Recent research emphasizes the importance of personal resources for employee well-being, together with organizational factors (Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2010; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). Personal resources are defined as positive self-evaluations related to resilience, namely the self-acknowledgement of one's ability to manage the demands and have an impact on the environment (Hobföll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). Personal resources are related to individual characteristics and can be improved by direct interventions. Specifically, psychological capital (PsyCap) is a personal resource relevant for employee well-being (Siu, Bakker, & Jiang, 2014). PsyCap is a "state-like" construct that contains four psychological capacities: efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004). In our research, PsyCap is studied as a direct predictor for well-being. Also, only a limited number of studies have focused on moderators of the relationship between PsyCap and well-being (Avey, Wernsing, & Luthans, 2008). Thus, it was determined that a high level of mindfulness associated with a high level of psychological capital contributes to the enhancement of positive emotions (Avey et al., 2008). Identifying the variables which may boost the impact of psychological capital is relevant because it advances knowledge on the conditions that facilitate positive outcomes (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011b). Notably, organizational factors and personal resources were found to be relevant for employee well-being (e.g., work engagement and burnout as specific forms of job-related well-being) (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). However, employee well-being is not limited to what occurs in an organization. Recent research has highlighted that non-work related activities and states, such as psychological detachment from work (i.e.,

mentally switching off), is particularly relevant for work engagement (Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2010). This is important because psychological detachment from work concerns the process in which psychological resources consumed at work can be replenished during off-job time and reinvested at work (Park, Fritz, & Jex, 2011). Thus, the interaction between PsyCap and psychological detachment has a particular effect on well-being because the impact of PsyCap might be enhanced by the experience of psychological detachment from work. An important aspect is that psychological detachment from work can enable the individual's engagement in various areas of life, therefore gaining more energy and developing perspectives that further help employees with high levels of PsyCap be more engaged in their work or experience less burnout.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the interaction between PsyCap and psychological detachment from work in the prediction of work engagement and burnout. From a personnel psychology perspective, this study aims at exploring whether employees with high PsyCap, who experience high levels of psychological detachment, can be more engaged in work and less burned-out.

PsyCap and well-being

PsyCap has been conceptually defined by Luthans and colleagues (Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007) as consisting of the four positive psychological resources of hope, optimism, efficacy, and resilience. Luthans and colleagues (2007) describe psychological capital as "an individual's positive psychological state of development 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

(resilience) to attain success" (Luthans et al., 2007, p.3). Each of these positive concepts make PsyCap a scientific construct with valid measures, being open to development, and having a positive impact on attitudes, behaviors, and performance (Luthans et al., 2007). Moreover, taken as a whole, PsyCap has been demonstrated conceptually and empirically (see Luthans et al., 2007) to be a higher-order core construct, according to the Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) (Hobföll, 1989). This means that PsyCap combines the mechanism(s) that these four personal resources have in common.

Significant research has tested the relationship between PsyCap and several employee attitudes (such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job-related well-being), behaviors (such as organizational citizenship behavior), and performance in the workplace (e.g., for a recent meta-analysis, see Avey et al., 2011). Recently, Avey, Luthans, Smith, and Palmer (2010), based on the COR theory, obtained significant results in the relationship between employees' levels of PsyCap and well-being.

A primary explanatory mechanism for the effect of PsyCap on job-related employee attitudes is that those with higher PsyCap expect good things to happen at work (optimism), believe they create their own success (efficacy and hope), and are more resistant to setbacks (resilience) as compared to those with lower PsyCap; also, they report being more satisfied with their job (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007) and more engaged in their organizations (Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008). On the other hand, PsyCap has been negatively "related to undesirable employee attitudes, such as cynicism toward change or turnover intentions" (Avey, Luthans, & Youssef, 2010, p. 439).

Engaged employees are enthusiastic and energetic about their work and fully immersed in it (Avey et al., 2008). Work engagement is defined as "a persistent and positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). Specifically, vigor and dedication are

considered core dimensions of work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Vigor is a measure of persistence in the face of difficulties and of high activation. Dedication is a measure of strong implication in work, sense of significance, and enthusiasm. De Waal and Pienaar (2013) found a strong relationship between work engagement and PsyCap. Regarding burnout, Schaufeli (2004) offered a comprehensive definition, stating that it is a persistent, negative, work-related state of mind in 'normal' individuals and is characterized primarily by exhaustion, which is accompanied by distress, a sense of reduced competence, decreased motivation and the development of dysfunctional attitudes at work. According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2001), two dimensions of work engagement are logically related to core burnout, namely vigor to exhaustion, and dedication to cynicism. Vigor refers to the activation dimension of well-being, while dedication refers to work identification. According to this framework, core burnout is characterized by "a combination of exhaustion (low activation) and cynicism (low identification), whereas core work engagement is characterized by vigor (high activation) and dedication (high identification)" (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010, p. 2).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the negative relationship between burnout and PsyCap. For example, Avey and colleagues (2008) found that there is a positive relationship between work engagement and hope, efficacy, optimism, and resilience; similarly, they identified a negative relationship between PsyCap and cynicism, as a cognitive part of the burnout dimension. Also, employees' psychological beliefs, expectations, and appraisals (i.e., hope, efficacy, optimism, resilience, or PsyCap) generate positive employee's attitudes, such as engagement. Therefore, we expect PsyCap, as a personal resource, to be positively related to work engagement and negatively related to burnout.

Psychological detachment from work as a moderator

Experiencing psychological detachment from work is important for improving well-being. Being psychologically detached at home means that the individual is not carrying out work tasks at home, nor thinking about job-related issues, problems, or opportunities during after work hours (Sonnentag et al., 2010). This is important, because such a recovery experience allows employees to unwind from work stress (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Moreover, based on the COR theory framework (Hobföll, 1989), recovery experiences help employees to replenish resources lost due to work demands. In contrast, a lack of recovery from work might contribute to lowering individual resources (e.g., increased fatigue). Thus, psychological detachment enables recovery and resource replenishment by psychologically distancing employees from work demands (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007).

Regarding the relationship between psychological detachment and work engagement, Sonnentag and colleagues (2010) have shown that psychological detachment from work during off-job time is an important factor that helps the increase of work engagement. Empirical evidence suggests that engagement at work and psychological detachment from work during off-job time are positively correlated (Kuhnel, Sonnentag, & Westman, 2008). Moreover, the authors found that individuals

with decreased levels of psychological detachment were significantly more likely to experience burnout and impaired psychological well-being, as compared to individuals who experienced psychological detachment (Sonnentag et al., 2010).

To our knowledge, there are no studies employing psychological detachment from work as a moderator of the relationship between PsyCap and well-being. The current study proposes psychological detachment from work during off-job time as a moderator in the relationship between PsyCap and well-being. The premise of this interaction is that psychological detachment from work helps employees build up personal resources (Sonnentag et al., 2010). Thus, when employees with high level of PsyCap mentally detach themselves from work when at home, they can gain new energy. In this situation, employees come to work with new energy resources that can help them maintain a high level of work engagement and decrease burnout. Therefore, we suggest that psychological detachment moderates the relationship between PsyCap and forms of well-being (i.e., work engagement and burnout).

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Based on the literature review, the following theoretical framework (see Figure 1) and hypotheses were developed.

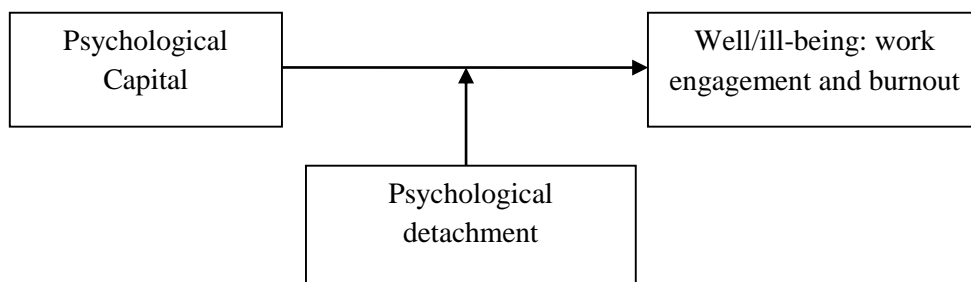


Figure 1. Proposed theoretical framework

H 1a: The positive relationship between psychological capital and vigor is stronger when the level of psychological detachment from work is high.

H 1b: The positive relationship between psychological capital and dedication is stronger when the level of psychological detachment from work is high.

H 2a: The negative relationship between psychological capital and exhaustion is weaker when the level of psychological detachment from work is high.

H 2b: The negative relationship between psychological capital and cynicism is weaker when the level of psychological detachment from work is high.

Method

Sample

The total sample ($N = 121$), based on a non-probabilistic convenience sampling procedure, consisted of 59 females (48.8%) and 62 males (51.2%). The age of the respondents ranged from 21 to 58 years ($M = 35.88$, $SD = 9.58$). The sample consisted mostly of employees who work in a multinational company from Romania, in the IT & C field.

Measures

Psychological capital was measured with the 24-item PsyCap Questionnaire (Luthans et al., 2007). This questionnaire consists of 6 items for each subscale: hope ("At the present time, I am energetically pursuing my work goals"), resilience ("I can get through difficult times at work because I've experienced difficulty before"), optimism ("When things are uncertain for me at work I usually expect the best"), and self-efficacy ("I feel confident contacting people outside the company (e.g., suppliers, customers) to discuss problems"). All items were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale with categories ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. To get a composite PsyCap score, all six responses for each of the four subscales were summed and averaged to first get a subscale composite average for each of the four subscales. Then the averages for each of the four subscales

were added together and averaged to get a composite average for each subject's PsyCap score. The internal consistency estimates in our sample were equal to .86 for PsyCap.

Psychological detachment (PD) from work was measured with a four-item scale developed by Sonnentag and Fritz (2007). A sample item is "I forget about work". Respondents were instructed to report their general level of detachment on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). The internal consistency estimates in our sample were .90 for psychological detachment.

Burnout was measured with two subscales from the Maslach Burnout Inventory General Survey (MBI-GS; Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996): Exhaustion (5 items) and Cynicism (4 items). Example items are: "I feel emotionally drained from my work" (Exhaustion) and "I have become more cynical about whether my work contributes anything." (Cynicism). All items were scored on a 7-point frequency scale, ranging from 0 ("never") to 6 ("always"). Exhaustion and cynicism are the core dimensions of burnout (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). The internal consistency estimates in our sample were .82 for Exhaustion and .82 for Cynicism.

Work engagement was measured with the dimensions vigor and dedication of the short version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006): Vigor (3 items) and Dedication (3 items). Sample items are: "At my workplace, I burst with energy." (Vigor) and "My job inspires me." (Dedication). All items were scored on a 7-point frequency scale, ranging from 0 ("never") to 6 ("always"). Following previous research (Van den Broeck et al., 2012), we used this two dimensions as core work engagement. The internal consistency estimates in our sample were .91 for Vigor and .85 for Dedication.

Procedure and analyses

The employees voluntarily participated in the study and were asked to fill out an online questionnaire. The general objective of the research was briefly presented to the participants, and they were promised

confidentiality at the individual level. Moderated hierarchical regressions were used to test the main effects and hypothesized interactions. Following recommendations by Frazier, Tix, and Barron (2004), all variables used as predictors were standardized to reduce multi-collinearity. Because each of the hypotheses was directional, one-tailed tests of significance were used.

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability

estimates for the variables in the model. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of reliability are greater than .70, ranging from .82 to .91. As predicted, a positive correlation was found between PsyCap and vigor ($r = .44, p < 0.01$), on the one side, and between PsyCap and dedication ($r = .40, p < 0.01$), on the other side. Also, a negative correlation of PsyCap was found with exhaustion ($r = -.24, p < 0.01$) and with cynicism ($r = -.42, p < 0.01$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations ($N = 121$)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. PsyCap	19.17	2.01	(.86)	.10	.44**	.40**	-.24**	-.42**
2. PD	10.93	4.21	-	(.90)	-.06	-.13	-.04	.17*
3. Vigor	11.50	4.54	-	-	(.91)	.78**	-.44**	-.43**
4. Dedication	11.93	4.12	-	-	-	(.84)	-.38*	-.61**
5. Exhaustion	7.66	4.89	-	-	-	-	(.82)	.66**
6. Cynicism	5.39	4.01	-	-	-	-	-	(.82)

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; one-tailed. *Note.* Cronbach’s alphas are listed on the diagonal.

Table 2 presents the results of the hierarchical regression analyses employed to test the relationship between PsyCap, psychological detachment, and interaction between PsyCap and psychological detachment, with vigor and dedication as dependent variables. After controlling the PsyCap, the effect of psychological detachment on vigor and dedication was tested in Step 2 for each regression analysis. And, the addition of the moderator variable also revealed a significant effect only for dedication. Results show that psychological detachment explained just 1% of the variance in vigor ($F = 1.86, n.s.$), but explained 3% of the variance in dedication ($F = 4.70, p < 0.05$).

Thus, psychological detachment predicts only dedication, after controlling PsyCap. More specifically, high levels of psychological detachment were related to lower levels of dedication, after controlling PsyCap.

The first two hypotheses of the present study anticipated that PsyCap would be associated with higher levels of vigor (H1a) or higher levels of dedication (H1b), in the presence of high psychological detachment. Because we did not find a significant interaction between PsyCap and psychological detachment in predicting both forms of work engagement (i.e., vigor and dedication), Hypothesis 1a and 1b were not supported.

Table 2. Moderated hierarchical regression analyses for vigor and dedication

Predictors	Vigor			Dedication		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	β	β	β	β	β	β
PsyCap	.44**	.45**	.45**	.40**	.42**	.43**
PD		-.11	-.11		-.18*	-.18*
PsyCap x PD			.01			.08
R^2	.19	.21	.21	.16	.19	.20
Change in R^2		.01	.00		.03	.00
F for change in R^2	29.27**	1.86	.05	23.89**	4.70*	1.01

Note: ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$.

Table 3 presents the results of the hierarchical regression analyses which tested the relationship between PsyCap, psychological detachment, and their interaction with exhaustion and cynicism, as dependent variables. After controlling the PsyCap, the effect of psychological detachment on exhaustion and cynicism was tested in Step 2 for each regression analysis. This addition of the moderator variable revealed a significant effect only for cynicism. Results show that psychological detachment explained 4% of the variance in cynicism ($F = 7.38, p < 0.01$). Thus, psychological detachment predicts only cynicism, after controlling PsyCap. More specifically, high levels of psychological detachment were related to higher levels of cynicism, after controlling PsyCap.

The following two hypotheses of the present study were that high levels of PsyCap would be associated with lower levels of exhaustion (H2a) or a lower levels of cynicism (H2b), in the presence of high psychological detachment. Because no significant interaction was found between PsyCap and psychological detachment in predicting exhaustion, Hypothesis 2a was not supported. However, for cynicism, the results showed that the two-way interactions between PsyCap and psychological detachment explained a statistically significant part of the variance for this form of burnout ($\Delta R^2 = .02, p < 0.05; F = 4.16, p < 0.05$). Simple slope analyses were conducted for only one statistically significant interaction in order to determine the nature and directionality of the interaction. Specifically, Hypothesis 2b was supported.

Table 3. Moderated hierarchical regressions analyses for exhaustion and cynicism

Predictors	Exhaustion			Cynicism		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	β	β	β	β	β	β
PsyCap	-.24**	-.23**	-.24**	-.42**	-.45**	-.46**
PD		-.01	-.00		.22**	.23**
PsyCap x PD			-.07			-.16*
R^2	.05	.05	.06	.18	.23	.25
Change in R^2		.00	.00		.04	.02
F for change in R^2	7.27**	.03	.73	26.86**	7.38**	4.16*

Note: ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$.

Using the procedure outlined by Aiken and West (1991), we plotted the high and low levels of each variable. When experiencing high psychological detachment, employees

with a high level of PsyCap reach a low level of cynicism (Figure 2). This result supports Hypothesis 2b.

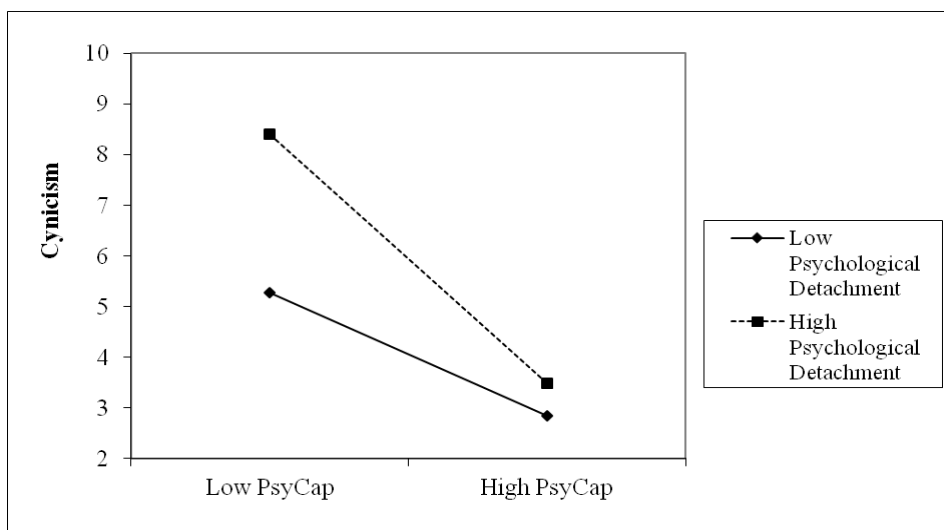


Figure 2. Interaction effect of PsyCap and Psychological Detachment in predicting Cynicism

Discussion

This paper investigated the relationship between PsyCap and two well-being components, namely work engagement and burnout, as moderated by psychological detachment from work. The results support only one of the four proposed hypotheses, the last one. In this study, PsyCap, as personal resource, was associated with work engagement and with burnout. This is in line with the current research perspective, where PsyCap was found to be positively associated with vigor and dedication, as part of work engagement (Luthans et al., 2008) and negatively associated with exhaustion and cynicism, as core part of burnout (Avey et al., 2008). Moreover, we found that psychological detachment from work correlated differently with two forms of well-being. Thus, psychological detachment from work during off-time was negatively related with dedication, but positively related with cynicism. This unexpected result between psychological detachment and cynicism was identified also in the first study of validation the scale of recovery experience (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). One possible explanation for this finding may be that, employees who experience a high level of psychological detachment from work could also experience

disengagement for work or feel indifference towards their work and the people in their work environment. Accordingly, under the same circumstances, this type of employees could develop cynical preoccupation at work.

An interesting finding was that psychological detachment failed to moderate the relationship between PsyCap and dedication. Psychological detachment from work during off-job time did not strengthen the positive relationship between PsyCap and dedication. One possible explanation for this may be that, at least in some circumstances, employees with high levels of optimism, hope, efficacy, and resilience manifest a strong involvement in their work, a sense of significance and enthusiasm related to their work. In these cases, disconnecting from work when they arrive at home does not improve dedication to work, because they have strong personal resources which help them cope with certain stressors.

The current study also showed that employees with higher PsyCap experience a lower level of cynicism when psychological detachment is high. Based on the COR theory, the availability of important resources such as psychological detachment during off-job time buffered the negative association between PsyCap and cynicism. Furthermore, a person who constantly has work-related thoughts

during off-job time might become more cynical, when this person has a low level of PsyCap.

Beyond providing additional support for earlier findings, the major finding and contribution of this study is understanding psychological detachment as an important moderator between PsyCap and cynicism.

The current study does have certain limitations and it is necessary to take these into consideration. Firstly, participants were tested at a single time point, and this type of design does not allow causal inferences. A longitudinal research design should be used to examine temporary association between PsyCap and the outcomes. Another potential limitation concerns the self-reported nature of data; thus, the common method variance could be a problem in data analysis. Future studies should consider including data from other sources (e.g., coworkers, partners) as external validation.

These results provide important insights into various human resources practices. Thus, the practical implications of this study are linked to training workshops for job incumbents. Firstly, since PsyCap is a personal resource and also a “state-like” one, organizations could invest in developing such resources in their employees. Short and online interventions on PsyCap are more attractive for organizations, particularly in combination with work schedules or even with specific tasks (Meyers, van Woerkom, & Bakker, 2013). Moreover, recent research has demonstrated how small changes in task assignments that underline the positive attitude of the leader can result in a significant increase of PsyCap (Avey, Avolio, & Luthans, 2011a). Secondly, it is necessary that leaders teach employees to manage work-life balance, particularly to experiment an authentically psychological detachment from work during off-job time. Therefore, these types of resources protect them from cynicism, when employees show a high level of PsyCap.

In any event, further research is still needed in this area before final conclusions can be drawn, and such efforts are encouraged. Future research should collect longitudinal data to better understand the relationship between PsyCap and well-being. Multi-wave

data could also be collected and should also include other types of resources from the individual’s private life (e.g., family support, friends support, or partner support). Thus, extending the research perspective area beyond organizational boundaries is a must for future research because only in this way can we understand multiple factors which contribute to the well-being of employees.

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