The International Journal of
INDIAN PSYCHOLOGY

Research Paper

A Study on Appreciation at work, Psychological Capital & Work Life Balance among Adults Employed in Online & Offline Workplaces

Ridhi Gupta[1]*

ABSTRACT

In the wake of Covid-19, many physical workplaces had to shift their gears to a virtual mode of functioning. While some people worked-from-home for a longer duration than they expected, some had to returnto their workplaces sooner than they could have predicted primarily due to the nature of their work. The present study investigates the relationship of appreciation at work, psychological capital, workplace-stress, and work-life balance among adults employed in both online and offline work settings, with the aim to decipher as to which mode of work has proved itself to be better with respect to our chosen variables. Standardized scales were used to measure all the variables mentioned above. A total sample of 70 (35 work-from-home employees & 35 work-from-workplace employees) in the age range of 22 to 40 was taken. The results show a significantly positive correlation between perceived appreciation at work and work-life balance; perceived appreciation at work and PsyCap; Facets of PsyCap (self-efficacy, hope, resilience & optimism) and PsyCap as a separate entity. It was found that employees engaged in the online work setting(s) tend to receive and perceive more appreciation at work as compared to employees engaged in the offline work setting(s) thus indicating that work-from-home employees stand a better chance of being able to maintain a reasonably good work-life balance and a high level of psychological capital. It is suggested for organizations to focus their attention towards adopting simple yet effective measures such as appreciating employees adequately to validate their efforts and indirectly or directly contribute to their general well-being.

Keywords: *Appreciation at Work, Workplace-Stress, Psychological Capital, Work-Life Balance, Work-From-Home.*

"We need to do a better job of putting ourselves higher on our own 'to do' list."
- Michelle Obama

In the wake of Covid-19 pandemic, thousands of enterprises had to make a shift in their mode of functioning. Back in the day when everyone took physical workplaces for granted, who could have imagined that one day work-from-home and virtual workplaces

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[1]Bachelors in Arts, Department of Psychology, G.G.D.S.D College, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India
*Corresponding Author

would become the new normal. Given the current scenario, wherein some people are employed in online job settings and some are gradually getting back to working from their workplace, it becomes crucial to investigate as to which mode of work is better with respect to employees' overall needs. To reach to a desired inference, the study investigates the relationship between appreciation at work, workplace-stress, psychological capital, and work-life balance among adults employed in both online & offline work settings. Appreciation at work could be seen as a process wherein an employer presents a word/gesture of acknowledgment and applause to employer(s) to validate their efforts at work. It is interesting to note that appreciation at work increases job satisfaction and helps employees to validate their judgments about their own performance (Pfister et al., 2020). Thus it is almost intuitive that appreciation at work must go a long way in promoting employees' wellbeing directly/indirectly. Workplace stress can be seen as a psychological strain experienced by employees especially during the time when they are not able to deliver as much as they are expected to. It is crucial to note that the psychological impact of workplace stress includes depression, persistent anxiety, pessimism, and resentment. Psychological capital is one of our many psychological capacities/resources that holds the potential of helping us up-scale our performance in work-settings and also generally. The four main facets that make up our psychological capital are self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism. A significant negative relationship between Psychological Capital of employees and their perceived symptoms of job stress have been found. The findings suggest the need to focus future research and practice on how PsyCap training may be a valuable part of organizational stress management (Avey& Luthans, 2009). It is intuitive that PsyCap thus holds potential to help employees cope with stress and promote well-being and hence their overall performance (Avey, 2010). Work-life balance can be looked at as a fine equilibrium between meeting the commitments of work and personal pursuits to a level where one feels a reasonable sense of satisfaction as far as both these domains are concerned. Research conducted by Van der Doef and Maes (1999) provides good evidence that highly demanding job setting(s) that have poor control over work scheduling and have adverse consequences for the health and well-being of employees as well as their families. The interwoven nature of our four variables; Appreciation at work, Workplace stress, psychological capital, and work-life balance as based on evidence found in previous studies paves way for the current study at hand to dive deeper into the nuances of these intuitive interlinkages.

Appreciation at Work
Appreciation has been defined as "acknowledging the value and meaning of something, an event, a person, a behavior, an objectand feeling a positive emotional connection to it." Further, Appreciation at work has been recognized as an important ingredient for success at workplace(s) (Adler &Fagley, 2005). It refers to "unconditionally acknowledging the person as an individual or acknowledging his or her performance, behavior, or qualities" (Grover, 2014; van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010).

Many studies have shown a positive correlation between appreciation at work, work-wellbeing, and good performance. A survey conducted by the Chicago Tribune of 30,000+ individuals found that the number one reason cited by employees who enjoy their work was that they feel genuinely appreciated at this company. As per, White (2015) "authentic appreciation" has a powerful, positive impact on employees' morale and job satisfaction. All in all, appreciation at work can be looked at as a win-win tool for both the employees and the employers if used effectively, adequately, and genuinely.

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Workplace Stress

Workplace stress is a condition that arises when what is expected from an individual "exceeds his or her real or perceived abilities to successfully cope with the demand, resulting in disturbance to his or her psychological and psychological equilibrium" (Kolbell, 1995). Occupational stress is defined by Beehr and Newman (1978) as "a situation where-in job-related factors interacts with a worker to change (i.e., disrupt or enhance) his or her psychological and/or physiological condition such that the person (i.e., mind-body) is forced to deviate from normal functioning." According to World Health Organization (2020) "Work-related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope."

Workplace stress has been shown to decrease productivity, promote absenteeism, and spread patterns of dysfunction in the workplace (Anderson & Puluch, 2001; Levin-Epstein, 2002). The psychological impact of workplace stress includes depression, persistent anxiety, pessimism, and resentment (Colligan &Higgans, 2005). It is thus intuitive that workplace stress is negatively related to employees' overall wellbeing and might as well play some role in disturbing/affecting one's work-life balance as well.

Work-Life Balance

Kirchmeyer (2000) defined work–life balance as "achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains and to do so requires personal resources such as energy, time, and commitment to be well distributed across domains." The above definition emphasizes on overall satisfaction felt by an individual in all domains of one's life. On the other hand, Clark (2000) looked at work–life balance as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict." In this definition, along with satisfaction being the key term, minimum role-conflict is also put to light. Another contemporary definition that acknowledges concepts such as individual and unique work/life priorities is put into words as follows, "Work–life balance is the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities" (Kalliath& Brough, 2008). Thus, from the above discussion we can infer that work-life balance is powerful tool that holds the potential of making us feel satisfied with our work and non-work pursuits if we successfully define what degree of what pursuit would meet our individual requirements and needs of satisfaction to the utmost level.

Psychological Capital (PsyCap)

Psychological capital can be defined as "an individual's positive psychological state of development that is characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-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, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). Luthans et al. (2007) captured the essence of what that psychological capital mainly focuses on, which is "who you are becoming" rather than "who you are". Psychological capital with its four main facets namely self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism is not a static psychological capacity that and individual either has or doesn't. It is a psychological capacity that can be built/developed using the right human resource interventions at workplace(s) to improve employee performance at large (Luthans et al., 2010).

PsyCap is certainly better aligned with the positive reactions and well-being at all levels (leaders, associates, and the overall organization) rather than the negativity and downward spiral associated with stagnation and losses (Luthans et al., 2006). Thus, from the above discussion of how different thinkers have elucidated the concept of PsyCap, we can infer that PsyCap is a powerful psychological tool that can go a long way in improving one's work performance and wellbeing if developed and nurtured correctly.

Self-Efficacy: "Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments" (Bandura, 1977). According to Carey & Forsyth (2009) "Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment." It is a possible that there could be a reciprocal relationship between performance feedback and self-efficacy; wherein performance feedback affects self-efficacy, but self-efficacy and goals also affect responses to feedback (Gist, 1987).

Hope: As defined by Snyder, Irving, and Anderson (1991), 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)."In a study it was found that, in the face of adversity, highly hopeful employees, who proactively develop back-up plans rather than allow themselves to be discouraged by predicament, make important contributors to the continued pursuit of organizational goals and values (Kim et al., 2017).

Resilience: Resilience can be defined as "the developable capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, failure or even positive events, progress, and increased responsibility" (Luthans, 2002). Resilience is "the capability of individuals to cope successfully in the face of significant change, adversity, or risk; this capability changes over time and is enhanced by protective factors in the individual and environment" (Stewart, Reid & Mangham, 1997). There is significant research evidence that acknowledges a strong relationship between resilience and the ability to perform life activities (work/non-work) effectively, in adverse conditions/situations (Coutu, 2002).

Optimism: Optimism as defined by Tiger (1971) is "a mood or attitude associated with an interpretation about the social or material- one which the elevator regards as socially desirable to his or her advantage, or for his or her pleasure." Similar to efficacy, optimism is amenable to development and can be enhanced by methods such as Schneider's (2001) three-step process, which includes leniency for the past, appreciation for the present, and opportunity seeing for the future" (As cited by Herbert, 2011).

Purpose
The present study aims to study the relationship between perceived appreciation at work, psychological capital, workplace stress and work-life balance among adults employed in online and offline work-setting(s).

Hypothesis
- There will be a negative relationship between workplace stress and perceived appreciation at work.
- There will be a positive relationship between work-life balance and perceived appreciation at work.
- Psychological capital will be positively correlated to perceived appreciation at work.

- There will be no difference in work from home employees and work from workplace employees with regards to workplace stress, psychological capital and appreciation at work.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The current study was conducted on a total sample of 70 adults in the age range of 22- 40 years (35 working-from-home and 35 working-from-workplace). The sample was collected from Hyderabad, Delhi, and Chandigarh.

Instruments

The following measures were used in this study

- **Perceived Appreciation at Work:** Items of Perceived appreciation (Gauglitz, 2019) were used to measure perceived appreciation at work among employees. It consists of 12 items and participants were supposed to rate the extent to which they feel appreciated at their workplace on a 5-point scale ranging from (1) doesn't apply at all to (5) entirely applies.
- **Workplace Stress Scale:** Workplace Stress Scale created and validated by The Marlin Company and the American Institute of Stress (2001) was used to measure workplace stress in our participants. It consists of 8 items and participants were supposed to rate the extent to which they feel stressed at/by their workplace on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) never to (5) very often.
- **Work-Life Balance:** A modified questionnaire of Hayman (2005) was used to measure work-life balance in our participants. It consists of 15 statements about work-life balance and our respondents were supposed to rate the extent to which these statements apply to their work/home life on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (5) Strongly agree. The original scale consisted of 19 items, which meant to assess three aspects of work-life balance: Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL), Personal Life Interference with Work (PLIW), and Work/Personal Life Enhancement (WPLE) (Fisher-McAuley et al, 2003). The present study utilized a revised version of Hayman (2005) work-life balance scale as used in a previous study conducted by Fathima (2018).
- **12 Item PsyCap Questionnaire (PCQ 12):** The Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ 12) developed by Luthans, Youssef, et al. (2007) was used to measure psychological capital (PsyCap) in our participants. It consists of 12 items pertaining to measure self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism. Participants were supposed to rate the extent to which the 12 statements applied to them on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree.

Procedure

The participants of the current study were briefly informed about the purpose of the research and their responses were collected through Google form(s). Standardized psychological tests were administered on all participants and they were assured of the confidentiality of their credentials to elicit honest responses eliminating any fear or inhibitions from there end. The entire procedure was performed whilst employing utmost level of ethical standards and confidentiality.

RESULTS

Table 1: Shows N, Mean & SD of all the variables

	Employees	Perceived Appreciation at work	Workplace stress	Work-life balance	Psychological Capital	Self-efficacy	Hope	Resilience	Optimism
N	Work-from-home employees	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35
	Work-from-workplace employees	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35
Mean	Work-from-home employees	51.8	21.7	45.1	54.2	14.2	17.5	12.9	9.63
	Work-from-workplace employees	48.2	22.4	45.0	55.3	14.5	18.3	13.0	9.91
Standard deviation	Work-from-home employees	6.85	3.23	10.4	8.17	2.63	2.91	2.12	1.85
	Work-from-workplace employees	8.86	3.32	12.2	9.25	2.88	3.63	2.82	1.79

Table 2: Shows correlation of all variables

	Perceived Appreciation at work		Workplace stress		Work-life balance	Psychological Capital		Self-efficacy		Hope		Resilience		Optimism
Perceived Appreciation	—													
Workplace stress	-0.139		—											
Work-life balance	0.250	*	-0.036		—									
Psychological Capital	0.268	*	0.049		0.158	—								
Self-efficacy	0.250	*	-0.044		0.153	0.876	***	—						
Hope	0.238	*	0.069		0.146	0.897	***	0.748	***	—				
Resilience	0.075		0.125		0.054	0.843	***	0.681	***	0.691	***	—		
Optimism	0.390	***	0.041		0.161	0.686	***	0.522	***	0.555	***	0.439	***	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3: Shows group-wise N, Mean, SD, Statistic and p of all the variables

Variables	Group	N	Mean	SD	Statistic	p
Perceived Appreciation	Work-from-home employees	35	51.83	6.85	1.9320	0.058
	Work-from-workplace employees	35	48.17	8.86		
Workplace stress	Work-from-home employees	35	21.69	3.23	-0.9484	0.346
	Work-from-workplace employees	35	22.43	3.32		
Work-life balance	Work-from-home employees	35	45.06	10.43	0.0210	0.983
	Work-from-	35	45.00	12.24		

	workplace employees					
Psychological Capital	Work-from-home employees	35	54.17	8.17	-0.5342	0.595
	Work-from-workplace employees	35	55.29	9.25		
Self-efficacy	Work-from-home employees	35	14.17	2.63	-0.4332	0.666
	Work-from-workplace employees	35	14.46	2.88		
Hope	Work-from-home employees	35	17.51	2.91	-0.9437	0.349
	Work-from-workplace employees	35	18.26	3.63		
Resilience	Work-from-home employees	35	12.86	2.12	-0.2874	0.775
	Work-from-workplace employees	35	13.03	2.82		
Optimism	Work-from-home employees	35	9.63	1.85	-0.6572	0.513
	Work-from-workplace employees	35	9.91	1.79		

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that there is a significant positive correlation between perceived appreciation at work and work-life balance ($r= 0.250$, $p< 0.05$); perceived appreciation at work and psychological capital ($r= 0.268$, $p<0.05$); perceived appreciation at work and self-efficacy ($r=0.250$, $p<0.05$); perceived appreciation at work and hope ($r=0.238$, $p< 0.05$); perceived appreciation at work and optimism ($r=0.390$, $p<0.001$). Statistically significant, positive correlation between perceived appreciation at work with variables such as work-life-balance and psychological capital (which entails self-efficacy, hope, resilience) suggest that when employees feel appreciated at their workplace(s)/the appreciation that they perceive at work increases, their psychological capital scales up; the quality of their work-life equilibrium gets positively affected and vice versa. It can also be implied that as the level of appreciation that employees receive by their employer(s) increase, their confidence in the work tasks/duties they perform also increases; they become more hopeful about their work lives; their capacity to bounce back from failures/set-backs increases; their capacity to take work challenges in stride increases; their optimism levels with regard to their work/home dynamics also increases and vice versa. Conversely if the level of perceived appreciation at work decreases, it would lead to a consequent decrease in an employee's quality of work-life balance, psychological capital, self-efficacy, hope and optimism.

As per the above attached statistical results, it can be observed that there exists a non-significant positive correlation between perceived appreciation at work and resilience ($r=0.075$, $p<0.05$). It can be implied that as the appreciation that an employee receives and perceives at one's workplace increases, their level of resilience, i.e. the bouncing back from challenging situations increases as a result and vice versa. Conversely if perceived

appreciation decreases, one's resilience would step down as well. Since the correlation is positive yet non-significant it must be noted that, even though the level of perceived appreciation of an employee is less than the ideal at his/her workplace, it does not necessarily curb their capacity to bounce back from failure(s) at their workplace. The above statement implies that even though there is a positive link between perceived appreciation at work and resilience, these variables do not necessarily determine the occurrence of one another. In other words, they do not share a perfect causal relationship.

It was also found that all the elements of Psychological Capital (self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism) show a significantly positive correlation with PsyCapin totality. The positive correlations thus found between self-efficacy and PsyCap was ($r=0.876$, $p<0.001$); hope and PsyCap was ($r=0.897$, $p< 0.001$); resilience and PsyCap was ($r=0.843$, $p<0.001$); optimism and PsyCap was ($r=0.686$, $p<0.001$). These results indicate that Psychological Capital as a separate entity is closely linked to its individual facets, implying the fact that if any individual facet of PsyCap (Self-efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism) increases, it is intuitive that the total PsyCap of an individual would increase as a result and vice versa.

It was observed that the individual facets/components of PsyCap are further significantly correlated with each other as well. The significant positive correlations thus found between hope and self-efficacy was ($r=0.748$, $p<0.001$); resilience and self-efficacy was ($r=0.682$, $p<0.001$); optimism and self-efficacy was ($r=0.522$, $p<0.001$); resilience and hope was ($r=0.691$, $p<0.001$); optimism and hope was ($r=0.555$, $p<0.001$); optimism and resilience was ($r=0.439$, $p<0.001$). The above-mentioned statistical results indicate the fact that if an individual is hopeful with regard to his future, he/she would also be self-confident while pursuing one's pursuits and vice versa. It is clear from the results that if an individual's ability to bounce back from difficult situations increases; it is likely that his/her self-confidence would increase as well and vice versa. It was also observed that if one's capacity to stay positive whatever the situation may be increases, one's capacity to be hopeful of one's future would also rise as a result and vice versa. Looking at the significant positive correlation between optimism and resilience it can be said that a rise in one's capacity to stay positive at one's workplace would also lead to an increase in one's capacity to bounce back from challenging situations/failures at work and vice versa.

The statistical tables indicate that there is a negative but non-significant correlation between work-life balance and workplace stress ($r= -0.036$) implying that there is a possibility that if one's work-life balance is satisfactorily good, it is probable that one's workplace stress levels would be low as a result and vice versa. However, it cannot be said that workplace stress is the only factor that determines the quality of one's work-life balance. The way forward for future studies could be to find out more factors responsible for making one's work-life balance better or worse. It can also be implied from the results that it is not necessary that a favorably good level of work-life balance in one's life would lower the levels of workplace stress in an individual. Future studies could perhaps focus their attention on finding significant factors that contribute towards increasing/decreasing one's workplace stress levels.

The results also indicate a negative, non-significant correlation between self-efficacy and workplace stress ($r= -0.044$) that suggests that if self-efficacy i.e., the confidence of an individual on oneself and one's abilities decreases, his/her workplace stress is likely to

increase and vice versa, however not significantly. Similarly, if one's workplace stress is on a rise, it is likely that one's self-confidence would go down and vice versa, however not significantly. However a study on PsyCap found a significant negative relationship between PsyCap of employees and their perceived symptoms of job stress (Avey et al., 2009). It must be noted here is that statistically significant correlations could vary due 'n' number of reasons, but what has been seen time and again in previous studies is the fact that PsyCap and its facet(s), here self-efficacy, generally tend to share a negative relationship with workplace stress.

The current study found that there is no significant correlation between hope, resilience, and optimism with workplace stress, implying that these facets of PsyCap do not necessarily play a role in determining one's workplace stress levels, and similarly, the workplace stress levels of an individual do not necessarily impact one's capacity to be hopeful, resilient, and optimistic.

A positive, non-significant correlation was found between PsyCap and work-life balance implying that an increase in one's psychological capital could lead to enhancement of one's quality of work-life balance and vice versa, however only to a mild extent. Similarly, it can be implied that a rise in the quality of one's work-life balance would lead to the enrichment of one's psychological capital and vice versa, however only to a slight extent. Future studies could perhaps focus their attention on finding the factors/variables that directly and significantly impact one's psychological capital as well as work-life balance.

A significant difference was found in the mean values of perceived appreciation among employees engaged in work-from-home (X= 51.83) as opposed to employees engaged in work-from-workplace (X= 48.17) implying that employees engaged in an online work setting(s) receive and perceive appreciation for their performance more than the employees engaged in an offline work setting(s) (t=1.9320).

Minor differences were observed in the mean values of workplace stress, work-life balance, PsyCap, self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism while comparing these variables with respect to our comparison groups i.e., employees engaged in work-from-home as opposed to employees engaged in work-from-workplace.

CONCLUSION

The primary aim of the current study was to find relationship(s) between perceived appreciation at work, psychological capital, work-life balance, and workplace stress among individuals engaged in online and offline work settings. The secondary goal of this research was to decipher which mode (out of the two: online vs. offline) would be better in reference to how the intertwined variables of the current study impact our comparison groups. A prominent difference between the two groups was seen in the level of appreciation they received and perceived at their respective workplace(s). The results revealed that the employees engaged in work-from-home received and perceived appreciation at work more than the employees working from their workplaces. Slight differences were observed between the statistical mean values of workplace stress, psychological capital, and work-life balance of employees when both the groups (online versus offline) were compared against all the variables. The current study does not favor either mode of job(s) because the nature of the comparative statistical results came out to be neutral. However, the implications of this study can potentially serve as a starting point for future research. The current study

urges future researchers to focus on specific tools that can help employees cope with workplace stress effectively and strike a reasonably good work-like balance for themselves. Organizations should invest their time, energy, and resources in devising and implementing relevant organizational tools and intervention techniques to help employees enhance their psychological capital. The current study as well as past studies have observed that a simple thing such as receiving & perceiving appreciation at work can go a long way towards making a positive impact on employees' wellness at large. It is worth building an organizational culture based on appreciation since it is an effective as well as an economical way to increase well-being (Stocker et al., 2010). Since a significantly positive correlation was found between perceived appreciation at work and work-life balance and perceived appreciation at work and psychological capital, it becomes important for future researchers and organizations to investigate as to how appreciation at work can be made more authentic, adequate, and effective at workplaces (both in online and offline work settings) to bring out maximum positive advantage(s) for both the employee(s) and organization(s) in terms of their psychological well-being and organizational productivity respectively.

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