

Hope at Workplace: A Review of the Literature

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ABSTRACT-- *The aim of this study is to understand the meaning of hope in different contexts and; develop an understanding on how hope influences different work related attitudes and behaviors. Key words such as origin of hope, psychological capital, consequences/antecedents of hope, importance of hope and; hope and organization were searched in Research Gate, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), American Physiological Association, Wiley Online Library, Indian Journals and Google Scholars to identify more than 100 articles. In-depth review was conducted to analyze the meaning, antecedents and consequences of hope in different contexts. The review has brought clarity in the definition and meaning of hope. The results suggest that, hope plays an important role in the overall wellbeing of an individual, especially at the workplace. Several research gaps have been identified for future researchers to pursue studies on hope. The article underlines the benefits of having hopeful employees in the organization.*

Keywords-- *Positive psychology, hope, workplace, stress, agency, pathways.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, the focus of the humankind was always on negative psychology because of military threats, poverty, irregular supply of food and various famines. However, Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (1998) stated, if the focus of studies of psychology shifts from researching negative outcomes such as poverty and illness and, focus on positive outcomes it will help humanity. In the last two decades, importance of positive psychology has been the topic of discussion in management literature. “Hope” is considered as one of the constructs in positive psychology, which is highly influential in personal and professional development of an individual. This paper is an attempt to consolidate the researches pertaining to this important psychological construct. The authors have conducted an in-depth literature review and have discussed the meaning of this construct in different contexts. The relationship of the construct with other constructs and recommendations for future research are also stated. Revenue and profits still being top priorities, organizations are showing more concern towards employee’s experience at the workplace (Mills et al., 2012). The effort by the companies to improve the experience of the employees at the workplace has further, improved the organization performance (Peterson & Seligman, 2003). Organization performance here means, amalgamation of organization’s vision, mission, goals and strategies into measurable tasks, which further sub divided and; shared with each employee of the organization based on their skills and hierarchy (Kaplan and Norton, 1996). As each individual performance is directly mapped to organization’s set goals, the correlation between individual performances and organization performances is evident (Sowa et al, 2004). Luthans (2003) stated that the employee performance may be improved by improving the

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malleable psychological capital (hope, efficacy, resiliency and optimism) of the employee, which in turn would positively influence the results of the organization.

Psychological capital describes, what is good in people by measuring their positive attitude, giving constructive feedback, which leads to the development of the individual, group and organization, largely (Luthans, 2004). There are four dimensions of psychological capital. First being, self-efficacy, which defines one's ability to set course of actions which are required to deal with situations (Stajkovic, 1998); second being, hope, which is a combination of a cognitive set of agency (goal-oriented determination) and pathways (means to achieve the goals) (Synder, 1991); third being, optimism, which is a psychological intention for the positive outcomes in future, irrespective of the challenges and roadblocks (Carver, 2003) and; resiliency, which is a propensity to overcome adversity (Masten, 2002). These components contribute to an individual's motivational propensity to achieve their goals (Luthans, 2010), and have been found to influence the collective psychological capital of the group leading to desired behaviors and performance outcomes at the group level (Walumbwa et al., 2011). These four dimensions shapes an individual's attitude at the workplace (Cameron, 2003) and literature also indicates the relationship between group level psychological capital and group level variables such as, performance (Walumbwa et al., 2011), trust on the management (Avey et al., 2009) and psychological empowerment (Mathe, 2011).

Psychological capital has been researched at different levels and the results have been convincing enough to explain its influence at the individual, group and organizational levels. Employees having higher levels of psychological capital have expanded thought processes, which help in building strong relation in the organization and this domino effect, results in high organization performance (Fredrickson, 2001). This is in accordance to the emotional contagion theory, which suggests, a simple act of positive emotions by managers is likely to increase positivity among the subordinates (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). Similarly, if the positive emotions are shared among team members at the workplace, it will spread across the organization (Walter & Bruch, 2008).

Among all the dimensions of psychological capital, hope has always been measured among the individuals suffering from illness or emotional losses. Recently, management researchers are seeing hope as a coping mechanism, even at the workplace (Petersons and Luthans, 2003). Hope is extensively researched in the field of medical science suggesting that, it is a successful drive when an individual is faced with illness. Researchers have found significance of hope on prisoner's life (Troshynski et al, 2016), the academic performance of students (Yoon, 2014), strength to one's physical and mental health (Synder, 2002) and; importantly, subjective well-being (MacLeod et al. 2007). The focus of medical and psychological research has been to identify the role of hope in dealing crisis.

The question here is- how hope can contribute at the workplace? People with high hope tend to be more diligent in pursuit of their goals (Lopez et al. 2003). Marques et al. (2009a) have found that, hope positively correlates with the level of competencies of individuals, which help them to build confidence and optimism at work. In a sample of college students, who were taught to develop hopeful thinking, it was found that they developed higher level of self-esteem and determination (Curry et al. 1999). Both these attitudes are found to be important to possess at the workplace.

Slezackova (2017) in her book "Hope and well-being" explains, how hope not only, influences individual's everyday life but also, helps to come out of life crisis. There are various facets of hope such as, hopeful thinking, an attitude which helps in attaining the ultimate personal and professional goals.

II. METHODOLOGY

The literature review study was undertaken between February 2018 and September, 2019. As it is a literature review article, the search strategy was to review the available literature on hope and workplace environment with predefined keywords.

Search Strategy

Key words such as origin of hope, psychological capital, antecedents /consequences of hope, importance of hope, components of workplace environment, hope and organization were searched in Research Gate, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), American Physiological Association, Wiley Online Library, Indian Journals and Google Scholars.

The search was not limited to any year but the search was refined further, with combined keywords to make it more relevant to today's scenario. Then, all the articles were reviewed individually and only articles which have keywords such as hope, and workplace were considered for the review.

Inclusion Criteria

Studies which deal with the concept of hope in medical and management were considered. All published articles were considered, irrespective of their origin of country. Only English language articles were considered.

Exclusion Criteria

Conference presentations, unpublished works, articles stating hope as abstract, unpublished medical research and Ph.D. thesis's and all such materials were excluded from the review.

III. THE BACKGROUND

There is not much existence of hope in the management literature particularly, in the Indian context. It is difficult to find the origin of hope in the Indian context. However, the first mention of hope seems to be in the holy book of Bhagwad Gita (a holy book in India). In Chapter 1, text 29, when in the battlefield, Arjuna (a warrior) says to Lord Krishna (a Hindu deity) that, he does not want to kill his own flesh and blood (his family members). Lord Krishna enlightened him by underlining the importance of this battle to mankind and stated that "the entire hope of humanity lies on him".

In the western culture, hope has been talked about from ages. The literature surrounding hope in the west has been in both, the positive as well as the negative context. In the west, the philosophers as well as the mythology have several stories on how hope was introduced to humanity. As per the Greek mythology, Zeus (sky and thunder god in ancient Greek religion) created the Pandora (first human woman created by Hephaestus on the instructions of Zeus) to take revenge from his brother Prometheus (a Titan of Greek mythology). He sent Pandora with a box, which was full of miseries and told her not to open but, because of her curiosity, she opened it and all the evil things, such as sickness, worries, crime, hate, envy and revenge; came out of it. The only thing remained in the box till the time Pandora got to close the box was "hope" (D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths, p.1-7).

In the field of research, hope as a concept, emerged in early 90's with the evolving concept of positive psychology and psychological capital.

IV. HOPE- THE MEANING

Just hoping for something to happen rather than putting effort is a misinterpretation of the concept of hope. Hope is easy for the foolish, but hard for the wise (Tillich, 1965, p.17). The interpretation of the meaning of hope has always been the topic of debate among researchers. Johnson (2007) describes hope as a 'vague, unclear and over-used concept', on the other hand, Chi (2007) states that it is an important mechanism, which gives courage to patients to fight with their ailments. Writers such as McClement and Chochinov (2008), Hammer (2009) and; Duggleby and Wright (2009) have stated that hope is a misunderstood term which is interpreted differently in different contexts. The construct "hope" has been widely used in different contexts like in health (patients, their relatives and practitioners), education (students) and society (prisoners). This may be one of the reasons, why it does not have a universally accepted definition. Hope is considered as an evolving concept, which has complexities with both cognitive and affective elements (Pia, 2016). Synder et al. (1991) defines hope, as a cognitive set of agency (goal-oriented determination) and pathways (means to achieve the goals). According to this definition, a hopeful person is one who finds various pathways to achieve his goals. Synder (1991) clarifies that hope doesn't mean wishful thinking, and explains it as a cognitive motivational system. Hope is not just feeling of being successful and achieving goals, it is a sense of successful determination in meeting goals (Synder, 2002). However, the consensus across the researchers is that, hope is a sense that creates the determination to attain the goals and finding the means to achieve them.

As far as the interpretation of the meaning of hope is concerned, it seems there are found two schools of thought. Not all the researchers have the same positive interpretation of hope as Synder (1991). Many researchers have explained hope as a negative feeling, which influences individuals negatively. O'Hara & Ortiz (2014) defined hope, as a human element, which is subjective in nature and differs from person to person. An individual in a lifespan goes through various aspirations, various circumstances, have different expectations, have different mental and physical health in his/her span of life to work towards his goals and all this circumstances, make it more challenging to define hope (Hammer, 2009). The general understanding that, the concept of hope is based on "uncertain" future, makes it less believable.

The two components of hope: agency and pathways play important roles in achieving pre-determined goals. Agency is considered to be the individual's 'will' to achieve goals in life and pathways are the different ways he/she can achieve these goals. Both the components are necessary to achieve goals but, they are not interchangeable. Both the components are different and play equally important roles; and are active till the attainment of the goal. It is also important to understand that agency and pathways are not in a hierarchy. It may be expected, that at the initial stages, when an individual decides to pursue a goal, the "will" of the individual plays a more crucial role as compared to the "different ways to achieve it". At the later stages, it may be expected that both the components reciprocate and help in the achievement of the goal.

There has been a global attention towards the construct of "hope" and its measurements. The "World Hope Index" is an indicator through which countries across boundaries are arbitrated on parameters such as long-term

change in national income, short-term change in income, innovation, improved water source, access to electricity, investment in education, saving rate, migration, political stability and absence of violence. The idea of this index is to promote hope as a social product which can help the entire world to develop a better future (Waslekar, 2017).

V. HOPE AS AN ANTECEDENT

Hope and Work Engagement

Work engagement is a positive and satisfying feeling that encourages oneself to perform the task better (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzáles-Romá, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). Work engagement is an important aspect of employee performance, an employee has to be well engaged to perform a task better (Menguc, Auh, Fisher, & Haddad, 2013).

Hope is a continuous pursuit of goals, which means being engaged to a goal. Employees, who possess high level of hope are the employees, who are energetically and enthusiastically engaged in their work (Gallagher and Lopez, 2009). Employees who set goals for them and try meticulously to achieve those goals are the employees who love their work and are positively engaged to it (Sweetman and Luthans, 2010).

Although the relation between hope and work engagement is very evident, it has never been research as a single predictor of work engagement (Ouweneel et al., 2012). It is also worth understanding as to which of the dimensions of work engagement (vigour, absorption and dedication) is more influenced by hope. The relationship may also be studied under the moderating and mediating influence of individual, group or organizational level variables.

Hope and Organizational Commitment (OC)

Organizational commitment is a state of mind of an individual towards organizational goals (Meyer, 1990). Committed employees are those who are invested in achieving organizational goals and try to find out various pathways when faced with difficulties.

Hopeful individuals are resilient and exhibit enthusiasm, involvement and commitment (Farran, Herth, & Popovich, 1995). Being hopeful is being committed towards the set goals, the individuals feel more positive and try to include others who can be part of achieving the set goals (Snyder et al., 1996). Therefore, study of hope in organizational context becomes vital; it can provide guide to align the individual's goals to organizational goals (Ludema, Wilmont, & Srivastva, 1997)

Study of hope and organizational commitment in the past have shown a strong relationship between the both. Future studies can focus on understanding the moderating or mediating effects of different organizational factors such as supervisor support, leadership, peer influence etc. on the organizational commitment of employees.

Hope and Job Satisfaction

Hope is about achieving the set goals, which leads to sense of achievement and satisfaction (Snyder et al., 1996). Job satisfaction has three aspects: a) it is considered as an emotional response, b) it is a match between employees expectation and the promises delivered or made by the organization, and c) other components such as pay, good working environment, career advancement, coaching and work itself plays an important role in having a positive job satisfaction. Hope contributes positively to all the three components of job satisfaction.

An individual with high hope always has many pathways to get to the goal so, their emotional responses are always positive. Individuals with high levels of hope are positive and contribute positively towards the organizational environment (Luthans, 1998). It will be worth identifying the moderating and mediating influence individual, team and organizational level variables in the relationship between hope and job satisfaction.

Hope and Psychological Wellbeing

Psychological wellbeing is defined as, having a positive self-perception, strong relations, good control of life, awareness of the environment and strong emotional mindset. (Carol,1995). Wright & Cropanzano, (2000) stated psychological wellbeing has significant relationship with employee performance; the same thoughts were seconded by Diener & Seligman, (2002) in which they also stated that psychological wellbeing also helps in building and maintaining strong relationships, which is the essence of good work life balance.

Hope is considered as an important contributor in the psychological wellbeing of individuals. An individual's hope is found to influence his/her ability to analyze the pathways to achieve the desired goal, the feeling of success and positivity which eventually, contributes to his/her positive psychological wellbeing (Avey, Luthans, Smith & Palmer, 2010).

There is research evidence of positive relationship between hope and health outcomes and; between psychological wellbeing and performance at workplace, but there is dearth of literature discussing the relationship between hope and psychological wellbeing, considering appropriate mediators and moderators.

Hope and Creativity

Being hopeful is about different ways to achieve a goal (pathways). To identify and act upon various pathways to achieve the goals, one has to be creative, as well (Amabile, 1996). Being hopeful is one of the basics of being creative. A creative individual must be a self-driven individual who, when faced with difficulties or a roadblock can think of different pathways to reach his/her goals (Shalley & Gilson, 2004).

Hopeful individuals are creative, autonomous and non-traditional thinkers. Although, the relationship between hope and creativity is evident, researchers have found difficulties are measuring the influence of hope on creativity (Sweetman et al., 2010). It will be interesting to understand the influence of hope on the creativity of designers, artists and like-creative people. Researchers may also enquire on the influence of hope as a moderator in the relationship between creative intentions and actual creative behavior. Research on hope will be particularly interesting, in SME's, which looks for people who are creative but, cannot provide them adequate resources to display their creativity.

Hope and other workplace attitudes

Individuals having higher levels of hope are motivated, less stressful and persistent when compared to less hopeful individuals (Synder, 2000a: Wandeler & Bundick, 2011). The employees, who are motivated and less stressed, contribute not only to their work, but to the entire workplace environment. Hope is found to be associated with one or the other aspect of work environment and the evidence states that, hope does contribute to the workplace environment not only directly but also, indirectly.

Empirical research such as of Avey, Luthans & Jensen (2009) found the influence of hope on job satisfaction, commitment (Adams, 2002), creativity (Rego, Machado, Leal & Cunha, 2009), developing supportive climate (Luthans, 2008), health and well-being (Avey, Petra & West, 2006) of employees.

VI. HOPE AS A CONSEQUENCE

Supportive Climate and Hope

Supportive Climate is a perceived support which an employee receives from its seniors, peers, juniors and all other departments within the organization which helps him/her to finish their tasks and achieve the set goals (Luthans, Norman, Avolio & Avey, 2008).

Pathways thinking is an integral part of being hopeful, it is processed to identify various routes to achieve the set goals. In a supportive climate, employee tries to explore alternate pathways in order to, achieve individual and organizational goals. The employees develop trust and loyalty towards the organization, which eventually may contribute to a better work environment (Luthans, Norman, Avolio & Avey, 2008).

The relationship between hope and supportive climate has not been empirically researched. It will be interesting to understand the influence of a supporting climate on the level of hope of employees.

To the best of researcher's knowledge, there is not much work done to identify the antecedents of hope. There is a lot of research scope if, hope is considered as a dependent variable. It is worth researching the variables which influences the level of hope among individuals. The variables may be considered at different levels such as the individual, team or organizational level. Individual level variables such as the influence of personality traits like honesty may be worth investigating. Researchers may also look into the type of humor of the supervisor which influences the hope of the employees. The influence of hope at the team level may influence the hope of a new entrant in the team. Future researchers may also study the influence of a team leader having high or low level of hope on his/her team, which has high or low level of hope. Organizational friendship and peer support may actually, have an influence on the level of hope of an individual.

VII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To keep up with the pace with which the workplace is changing, being hopeful, is not a choice. Hope is more than a wishful thinking. It is a habit to keep the sanity intact. It does differ from individual to individual and situation to situation but, being hopeful is not a choice but, a lifestyle. There is scope for further research, to understand how hope contributes to various work place related variables.

Hope has a human element, which is subjective in nature and differs from person to person. There is a bit of confusion around the definition of hope. But, it is also found from the review of literature that it plays an important role at the workplace. An employee's level of hope is found to influence his/her attitudes at the workplace such as; psychological well-being, work engagement, supportive climate, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, creativity etc. The current literature also underlines the importance of having a hopeful workplace environment to create a stress free work culture.

Although hope cannot be taught but, there is research evidence that hope can be imbibed with targeted efforts from the organization. Hence, the review suggests that the organizations should work on building

the hope in employees for their better performance and for organizational development, by and large. There is a lot of scope of conducting experimental research to understand the factors that influence the development of hope among individuals. This will help the organizations to understand, how employee's hope can be developed using the organizational systems and policies. This will also help the trainers to develop modules or training programs to develop an individual's level of hope.

Organization level variables such as culture, type of organization, strategy, age of the organization etc. are missing from most of the researches. Researchers should also consider taking moderators such as the hierarchy of the employee, demographic of the employee, organization status (it is a startup or MNC) etc.

Researchers may also work on what strategies organizations should come up with to imbibe the feeling of hope in the employees, how much and till what extent, time and money an organization can spend on doing so etc. Future researchers should focus more on experimental and longitudinal studies to test the influence of different variables which may contribute to the development of the level of hope among individuals.

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