

PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING: SYSTEMATIC INSIGHTS

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Abstract

The review synthesizes research on employees' psychological capital and its relationship with employee well-being. The aim is to critically evaluate the literature which examines how positive psychological resources mitigate workplace deviance and enhance employee well-being. It clarifies dominant theoretical explanations, resolves inconsistencies in causal positioning, and identifies key research gaps, drawing primarily on Conservation of Resources theory, Social Exchange theory, and the Job Demands–Resources framework to explicate the conceptual positioning of psychological capital. The potential of psychological capital as a key mechanism for sustaining resources, even in a challenging organizational climate. The organizations enhance employee well-being by embedding psychological capital development interventions within HR practices, leadership approaches, and supportive work climates. Adverse workplace conditions often give rise to undesirable attitudes and behaviours such as cynicism, turnover intentions, job stress, anxiety and deviance. This enables the organisation to adopt a proactive strategy for promoting employee well-being.

Keywords: *Psychological Capital, Employee well-being, positive organizational behaviours, Incivility, SLR*

Introduction

Employee well-being has emerged as a central concern for contemporary organizations, not only as a moral and humanistic priority but also as a strategic imperative for sustaining performance, engagement, and long-term organisational viability. As the working environment has become more complex, emotionally demanding and requires interaction, organizations now a days are realizing that employee well-being is very closely affected by the service quality, productivity, and workforce stability. Yet, despite this growing recognition, early organisational research has adopted deficit-oriented lens, focusing on the adverse psychological consequences of demanding and unfavorable working environments (Butt & Yazdani, 2021). The working environment affects the levels of workplace stress, burnout and emotional exhaustion. The organizations that understands the importance of resilience, adaptation, and sustained functioning at work, emphasize on creating positive psychological capacities in order to shape employee experiences under stressful environment (Han & Garg, 2018).The evidences suggest that negative experiences adversely affect employees resulting in emotional exhaustion; decreased job satisfaction; disengagement from work and other job-related activities; and poor work performance, mainly in service-based jobs requiring face-to-face interactions (Butt & Yazdani, 2021; Khanam & Tarab, 2024). Not only employees but also the organizations have to face the consequences such as decreased

service quality; increased the prevalence of employee burnout; reduced the likelihood that employees will return to work. It has adverse impact on employee retention, which signifies major challenges to the sustainability of organisations (Al-Kahtani & Sulphrey, 2022). Workplace incivility is an example of a stressor that is of increasing interest to researchers as it can arise from a variety of interpersonal stressors and has yet to be defined with clarity. While overt forms of displacement may be described as being high in intensity, workplace incivility tends to be associated with low intensity forms of displacement (i.e. rudeness, exclusion, dismissal, etc.) that violate norms of mutual respect but are unclear as to their intent. According to meta-analytic studies, about one-fourth of workers in the healthcare sector have experienced incivility at work. Some have a much higher level of exposure over time (Han, 2021). From previous research done on large samples in North America, up to 98% of workers experience incivility at least once in their work lives, which illustrates that incivility is pervasive in many workplaces (Han, 2021). In addition, it has been reported over the past year that the rate of incidents of incivility has escalated, indicating an increased level of stress between co-workers. Based on these types of trends, it is recommended that incivility at work is no longer a rare or isolated phenomenon, but rather an ongoing or fundamental characteristic of many contemporary workplaces, which poses a continual threat to workers' health and well-being. Rooted in Positive Psychology and Positive Organizational Behaviour, PsyCap reflects a positive psychological state comprising hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism and is conceptualized as state-like and developable, making it suitable for organisational intervention (Luthans et al., 2007; Luthans & Youssef, 2004). Empirical evidence shows that PsyCap predicts job satisfaction, performance, and well-being beyond human and social capital, highlighting its unique value (Luthans et al., 2007). According to this perspective, individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect their valued resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Stress occurs when valued resources are threatened or lost. Thus, workplace incivility can be conceptualised as a stressor that drains resources from employees' emotional and psychological reserves. On the other hand, it can be viewed as a major psychological resource that helps employees cope with emotional strain, recover from resource loss, and adapt to the chronic demands of their jobs. PsyCap is a part of a larger "resource caravan" of resources that enhance the employees' ability to mitigate incivility and other workplace stressors, and to foster continued employee well-being (Avey, Luthans, & Youssef, 2010). There are strong empirical evidences that support the relationship between PsyCap and employee well-being. The results of meta-analyses show that that PsyCap is positively related to psychological well-being, work engagement, and job satisfaction, whereas PsyCap is negatively related to stress and emotional exhaustion (Avey et al., 2011). In service contexts characterized by frequent interpersonal stressors, PsyCap has also been shown to buffer the adverse effects of incivility on emotional exhaustion and performance, enabling employees to maintain psychological balance and functional effectiveness (Khanam & Tarab, 2024). PsyCap, in fact emphasizes on the dynamic role of psychological resources to cope up with workplace incivility rather than just traits. If PsyCap is considered as strength, organisations may explore new ways for reducing the negative consequences of incivility and may be able to create healthier work environments (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2015).

Research Methodology

For this study, a systematic literature review was conducted to collect journal articles from the Scopus Database. Keywords include 'Psychological Capital' and its acronym 'PsyCap,' in conjunction with 'Workplace Incivility,' 'Incivility,' as an umbrella term. Both the full terms and their abbreviations were included to provide maximum coverage across disciplines. We included Workplace Incivility as a primary focal point so that my search would remain concise and theoretically aligned, particularly given that Workplace Incivility represents an unrelenting source of and a subtle source of interpersonal stressors. The papers reviewed

during the process include the temporal scope from 2011 to 2025.

Workplace Incivility and Psychological Capital

Workplace incivility refers to low-intensity disrespectful behaviours—such as rudeness, exclusion, neglect, or dismissive communication—that violate norms of mutual respect and often become normalised in everyday organisational interactions (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson et al., 2000; Roberts et al., 2011). Repeated exposure to workplace incivility from supervisors, co-workers, customers, and family members has been shown to result in deteriorating employee wellbeing which leads to: emotional exhaustion and burnout; reduced engagement in their work; impaired quality of service delivery; and poor psychological wellbeing (Lanzo et al., 2016, Chang et al., 2019; Al-Zyoud & Mert, 2019; Yang et al., 2023). Psychological Capital (PsyCap) is a key factor in how employees perceive and react to experiences of incivility. Employees with relatively high levels of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism have been found to have better emotional regulation skills and less emotional exhaustion, and therefore they are more able to maintain their level of engagement and performance, even in the face of exposure to workplace incivility (Lanzo et al., 2016, Sarkar et al., 2023, Tetteh, 2024). It is important to note that there is evidence that the relationship between PsyCap and work incivility is reciprocal; that over a period of time an employee who has accumulated several experiences of incivility may see a decline in their overall PsyCap and as such will have reduced ability to cope, and subsequently experience increased vulnerability to the negative effects of work incivility (Kumar et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2023; Srivastava & Maurya, 2017).

Table 1

Source	Target Population	Source of Incivility	Primary Stressor	Mediating Factor	Moderating Factor (Resource)	Measured Outcomes	Theoretical Framework
(Tetteh, 2023)	Restaurant employees	Supervisors, colleagues, and customers	Workplace incivility	Emotional exhaustion	Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	Work engagement	COR and AET
(Kuriakose et al., 2023)	Frontline hotel employees	Family members	Family incivility	Negative rumination	Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and POS	Service delivery	COR
((Paul Vincent et al., 2022a)	Emergency medicine doctors	Family members	Family incivility	Burnout	Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	Job satisfaction	COR and Work-Home Resources model
(Maria Tresita et al., 2023)	Rural doctors	Family members	Family incivility	Life satisfaction	Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	Burnout	COR and Work-Home Resources model
(Dongmo	Employee	Cowork	Workplace	Emotional	Psychological	Pro-	COR

(& Tanova, 2025))	es in service industry (Banking and insurance)	ers	incivility	exhaustion and mindfulness	l Capital (PsyCap)	environmental work behavior	and SDT
(Azeem et al., 2023)	Employees in various organizations (Textiles, banking, education)	Coworkers	Coworker incivility	Psychological detachment	Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	In-role and extra-role job performance	COR
(Nawaz et al., 2020)	Bank employees	Colleagues and peers	Coworker incivility	-	Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	Thriving at work (Learning and vitality)	Appraisal Theory and SET
(Amponsoh-Tawiah et al., 2023)	Bank employees	Coworkers	Coworker incivility (Exclusion, lack of courtesy)	Emotional Intelligence	Emotional Intelligence	Employee engagement (Vigor, dedication, absorption)	Appraisal Theory
(Al-Zyoud& Mert, 2019)	Healthcare workers	Coworkers	Coworker incivility (Gossip, shunning)	-	Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	Psychological distress	COR and SET
(Yang et al., 2023)	Health and fitness club employees	Coworkers and customers	Daily workplace incivility (Exclusion, gossip, rudeness)	-	Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and self-reported health	Daily emotional exhaustion	COR and JD-R
(Chang et al., 2019)	Recreational sport and fitness club employees	Customers, supervisors, and coworkers	Workplace incivility (Hostility, gossiping)	-	Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and perceived service climate	Emotional exhaustion and burnout	AET and JD-R
(Pham et al., 2025)	University students	Faculty, staff, and students	Incivility behavior	Psychological distress and perceived peer support	Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	Academic performance	COR
(Kumar et al., 2023)	Essential services employees (Education and healthcare)	Supervisors and colleagues	Workplace incivility	-	Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	Work engagement	JD-R

	e)						
(Megeirhi et al., 2018)	Hospitality industry employees	Coworkers, supervisors, and management	Tolerance to workplace incivility	-	Team Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	Employee cynicism and job search behavior	Social Contagion Theory
(Cassidy et al., 2014)	Employees in various UK organizations	Coworkers and supervisors	Workplace bullying (Teasing, social exclusion)	Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and social support	Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and social support	Psychological distress, job satisfaction, and mental health	Transactional Model of Stress
(Roberts et al., 2011)	Working adults (Various industries)	Coworkers	Job stress	-	Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	Propensity to engage in Incivil behaviors	Stressor-Emotion Model of CWB
(Setar et al., 2015)	Call centre employees	Not in source	Job stress	-	Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	Incivility and job involvement	Job stress model and Broaden-and-build theory
(Lanzo et al., 2016)	General employees (Various industries)	Instigated by the employee	Workplace incivility (Instigation)	Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and stress	Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	Uncivil behaviors	Social Cognitive Theory

Mediating Factors Linking Primary Stressors and Employee Outcomes

The empirical research clearly demonstrates that the consequences of incivility and related workplace stressors on employee outcomes unfold gradually through a series of well-established psychological pathways. Evidence from both cross-sectional and diary-based studies consistently identifies emotional exhaustion as the most powerful and frequently observed mediating mechanism. Specifically, workplace incivility has been shown to significantly increase emotional exhaustion, which subsequently translates into lower work engagement, poorer self-rated health, and reduced performance (Chang et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2023). Beyond immediate depletion, empirical findings further indicate that negative rumination plays an important mediating role in the relationship between family-based incivility and work outcomes. Employees who persistently dwell on disrespectful family interactions experience heightened emotional strain and diminished service quality; however, these indirect effects are noticeably weaker among individuals with higher levels of psychological capital (Alola et al., 2023). Moreover, results from studies employing moderated mediation approaches reveal that prolonged exposure to workplace incivility is associated with declines in both job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction through burnout as a central explanatory mechanism (Alola et al., 2022; Alola et al., 2023). In situations where individuals do not have adequate coping resources, the research shows that coworker incivility results in increased psychological distress among employees working in emotionally demanding service and healthcare settings; the adverse effect can be mitigated by higher levels

of Pyscap (Bibi et al., 2013; Avey et al., 2010). Finally, findings from interaction and mediation analyses highlight perceived peer support as a critical relational buffer, as supportive peer environments reduce emotional exhaustion and weaken the negative indirect effects of coworker incivility on employee well-being and performance (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Hershcovis et al., 2025).

Measured Outcome

Work Engagement and Employee Engagement

Engagement is utilising employees' personal capabilities in work-oriented roles by showcasing their physical energy, cognitive focus, and emotional involvement while performing their roles in the work environment. (Kahn, 1990). The study shows that psychological capital is a beneficial personal resource whereas workplace rudeness adversely affects employee engagement (Kumar et al., 2023; Tetteh, 2024). The workplace rudeness acts as main stressor and considerably lowers work engagement, directly (Kumar et al., 2023) or indirectly through emotional strain (Tetteh, 2024). In contrast, emotional intelligence mediates the adverse impact (Amponsah-Tawiah et al., 2023).

Service Delivery and Job Involvement

Among frontline employees, both workplace and family incivility interfere with service delivery and job involvement by draining emotional and cognitive resources. However, employees with higher psychological capital are better able to contain these spillover effects and maintain service quality in demanding interpersonal environments (Chang et al., 2019; Alola et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2023).

Job Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction

Job and life satisfaction are frequently examined, particularly in healthcare and family-incivility settings. Findings suggest that the rudeness or disrespectful interactions decrease satisfaction; however, this negative effect becomes insignificant for those who have stronger psychological capital (Srivastava & Maurya, 2017; Kumar et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2023; Alola et al., 2022).

Burnout

Burnout is a debilitating state in which individuals no longer meet work demands. Burnout contributes to depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and guilt (Maslach et al., 2001) and antecedent to workplace incivility (Vasconcelos, 2020). Experiencing rudeness at home diminishes overall life satisfaction and raises the risk of burnout at work. Individuals with high Pyscap are better equipped to cope with burnout (Paul Vincent et al., 2022).

Emotional Exhaustion

The workplace incivility significantly increases employees' emotional exhaustion, and psychological capital consistently reduces overall exhaustion levels (Chang et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2023). However, psychological capital can offset the direct incivility exhaustion relationship. The key difference in Yang et al. (2023) demonstrates a daily spillover effect of exhaustion and identifies self-reported health as a significant buffer, whereas Chang et al. (2029) establish the role of service climate in reducing exhaustion and strengthening psychological capital.

Psychological Distress and Mental Health

Psychological distress is a state of emotional discomfort that disrupts the functioning and reflect the poor mental health (Al-Zyoud & Mert, 2019). The study supports that incivility increases distress. But the employees with higher psychological resources keep their well being intact. (Al-Zyoud & Mert, 2019)

Thriving at Work

Thriving is an individual's positive psychological state who experiences progression through learning and a sense of vitality in their work (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Psychological capital functions as a protective resource, reducing the damages caused by incivility and enhancing the benefits of prosocial motivation. (Nawaz et al., 2020).

Academic Performance

Incivility weakens academic performance by exhausting students' psychological resources and emotional energy. However, Psycap primarily reduces the impact of psychological stress rather than strengthening the effect of peer support on academic performance (Pham et al., 2025).

Pro-environmental Work Behaviours

The action to improve the organisational process in an environmentally responsible way includes everyday sustainable practices to voluntary initiatives that exceed formal job requirements (Contor et al., 2015; Saeed et al., 2019). Workplace incivility depletes employees' emotional resources, leading to higher emotional exhaustion and, consequently, lower engagement in pro-environmental behaviours. In contrast, organisational support directly encourages sustainable workplace practices and reduces exhaustion. However, mindfulness and psychological capital are unable to mitigate the relationships within the setting (Dongmo & Tanova, 2025).

Employee Cynicism and Job Search Behavior

A feeling of distrust and scepticism towards the organisational action and decision (Andersson & Bateman, 1997), that negativity does not stay internal for long. It often leads to preparatory action to explore and pursue alternate job opportunities (Blau, 1994). However, Megeirhi et al., (2018) highlights that authentic leadership interrupts this cycle by reducing negative employee behaviours, like cynicism, workplace incivility and job search behaviours.

Propensity to Engage in Uncivil Behaviours

Some studies extend the focus to employees' own behaviours, showing that job stress and repeated exposure to incivility increase the likelihood of instigating uncivil acts. Workaholics are more prone to engage in uncivil acts at the workplace, partly because they have low psychological capital, and stress alone doesn't fully explain how workaholics behave uncivilly. (Lanzo et al., 2016)

Theoretical Approaches

The study of incivility in the workplace and psychological capital encompasses multiple theories that together can account for how employees are exposed to mistreatment by coworkers, how they regulate their emotional reactions and how they can function effectively while being persistently exposed to stress. Rather than relying on a single dominant framework, the literature reflects a pluralistic theoretical orientation. The study applying Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, characterizes incivility as a graduation erosion of psychological and emotional resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Research using this framework has consistently shown that when individuals are repeatedly exposed to uncivil behaviours (in the workplace or via family spillover), they will suffer from diminishing amounts of emotional energy, leading them to become exhausted, burned-out and less well-off (Lanzo et al, 2016; Srivastava & Maurya, 2017; Yang et al., 2023). Psychological capital is frequently identified within the literature as a valuable resource for helping employees counteract this resource depletion. Incivility can become chronic and weaken the psychological capital resulting in a reciprocal and cumulative loss process rather than a one-time buffering effect (Kumar et al.,

2023; Yang et al., 2023). Resources (JD-R) model is used to examine how incivility can increase the levels of strain on the individual by increasing job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). Using the JD-R model, psychological capital can be viewed as an available resource for the individual to assist in being engaged and adaptively performing at work when faced with high levels of demand. Research has shown that incivility not only increases job demands but also has the ability to deplete the resources that were previously available for the individual, thus negatively impacting both engagement and well-being, even when there are large amounts of resources available to the individual (Kumar et al., 2023). Cognitive appraisal-based perspectives focus on how employees interpret experiences of incivility; for example, according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), employees with high psychological capital tend to interpret interactions with incivility as not personal threats or unmanageable; thus, they experience lower levels of emotional strain when compared to employees with low psychological capital, who tend to have more negative appraisals and experience more exhaustion (Chang et al., 2019). Affective Events Theory explains how small negative experiences at work. When people face rude or disrespectful behavior, it often triggers quick emotional reactions like anger or frustration. These emotions then influence how employees feel about their jobs, how engaged they are, and how their well-being is affected (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Lanzo et al., 2016). Psychological capital helps in this process by enabling employees to manage their emotions better and recover faster, which reduces the strength and lasting impact of these negative feelings (Sarkar et al., 2023).

Relational theories of workplace incivility are often based on Social Exchange Theory and examine how violations of norms related to reciprocity and respect erode the social bonds created through social exchanges (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Frequent uncivil behavior send signal that employees who engage in such behavior have very little social value and also leads other employees to withdraw and disengage from productive work in the organization. However, the presence of high levels of psychological capital allows employees to sustain constructive engagement in the workplace even when their social exchanges are characterized by relational imbalances (Tetteh, 2024). Several studies extend these explanations beyond organisational boundaries by adopting work-home and spillover perspectives, showing that family incivility and non-work stressors further deplete psychological capital and intensify burnout at work (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Srivastava & Maurya, 2017). Additional perspectives—including Self-Determination Theory, social contagion views, stressor-emotion models, and broaden-and-build theory—are used more selectively to explain motivation loss, emotional transmission, and the longer-term benefits of positive psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2001). Collectively, this body of work shows that workplace incivility erodes employee well-being through overlapping emotional, cognitive, and relational pathways, with psychological capital acting as a key—but fragile—resource that shapes how employees endure and recover.

Discussions & Conclusions

Workplace incivility is becoming more common and has a clear negative impact on employee well-being. The studies show that many employees experience rude and disrespectful conduct at work, turning incivility a part of their daily working life. Over time, repeated exposure to such behaviour reduces employees' energy, engagement, and mental well-being, and increases stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion. Psychological capital plays an important role in how employees deal with incivility. Employees with higher levels of hope, confidence, resilience, and optimism are better able to stay calm, manage their emotions, and recover from negative interactions. Although psychological capital does not remove incivility, it reduces its harmful effects and helps employees maintain their well-being. The findings show that workplace incivility is not a matter of a day, it builds up over a period of time. When employees feel continuous disrespect it slowly drains their energy which can worsen the situation. They

can become cynical and ruder in their behavior. It can be concluded that workplace incivility is increasing day by day adversely affecting employee well-being. If organizations ignore everyday disrespect, it weakens their psychological resources and lowers employee engagement and adversely affect the mental health of employees. In fact, psychological capital emerges as a key resource which protects employee well-being in uncivil work environments. By strengthening psychological capital with the help of supportive leadership, team work and HR programs, the organisations can reduce the adverse effect of incivility. It will definitely result in long-term employee well-being.

Managerial Implications

The role of managers is critical as they can help create a more civil workplace by creating an environment in which their employees can develop their psychological capital. Key features of this environment would be offering simple and focused training programs that increase the levels of hope, confidence, resiliency, and optimism. When employees have these characteristics, they will be able to respond to rude behaviour in a calm and productive manner while protecting their mental health. Managers can assist employees in developing the ability to bounce back from sources of stress or disrespect through the promotion of resilience-building activities. This will directly reduce emotional exhaustion and burnout, which ultimately leads to greater employee engagement. Managers should encourage employees to set clear goals and to think positively about achieving those goals. By doing so, they will reduce the frustration and anxiety associated with stressful situations and help employees maintain focus in a time of difficulty. Another way that managers can assist employees is to assist in building employee confidence through mentoring, coaching, and skill-building opportunities. When employees feel competent in dealing with challenging situations, they will be able to reduce their anxiety associated with dealing with those situations, therefore responding to them more positively. Another way that managers can assist employees is by promoting optimism in the workplace by providing employees with positive feedback and providing opportunities for employees to think reflectively about their experiences. When employees perceive a negative situation in their workplace as less personal and less damaging, they will be able to maintain their optimism. Finally, by their behaviours, managers have a significant impact on workplace culture. By demonstrating respectful communication and providing employees with genuine support, managers can create a safe, supportive, and positive work environment for employees. In addition, by strengthening peer support among teams, employees will be better able to cope collectively when faced with incivility. Overall, viewing workplace incivility through the lens of psychological capital allows for a balanced approach that includes prevention, coping and long-term capability building and is particularly relevant in today's rapidly changing and complex working environments.\

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