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For Organizations

As Chap. 1 of this book has shown, PWB is important for individual employees in many different ways. Higher PWB is linked to life success, better health, mortality, career success, better relationships with others and more. This chapter concentrates on the benefits that high levels of PWB bring to the organization. Let's begin by looking at a few examples in specific sectors.

One of the biggest problems that hospitals in some countries have to face at the moment is the incidence of Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus* (MRSA). MRSA is a nasty infection that has developed some resistance to antibiotics. For patients with open wounds or with weakened immune systems MRSA is very dangerous and health professionals are interested in finding ways of minimizing its spread. One solution, which has been tried in several countries, including the United States, the Netherlands and Denmark, is to screen patients before admission to hospital. Obviously this can work up to a point, but does not guard against infection acquired while a patient is staying in hospital. Rigorous cleaning of surfaces, gowns and so on and regular handwashing with effective cleansers are essential to minimize the spread of MRSA within a hospital. Anyone about to enter hospital would be interested in the factors that are linked with lower rates of MRSA infection. One link that has been established is between indicators of staff well-being and rates of MRSA infection (Boorman 2009). The relationship between MRSA infection and staff well-being does not seem to arise because members of staff with lower well-being are likely to be carrying the bacterium (although this is possible and some studies have found

quite high levels of staff, more than 10%, carrying MRSA). The relationship seems more likely to arise because members of staff with higher levels of PWB behave differently—in ways that are likely to reduce the incidence of MRSA—more about this later.

Manufacturing industry has a very different environment from health care. In this type of work environment there are often quite clear measures of productivity, and competition is such that companies need to do everything that they can to improve the productivity of their employees. One specific factor that has been linked with productivity is whether employees feel that the organization shows concern for their welfare (Patterson et al. 2004). When this is the case the organization can expect to see better productivity levels. Malcolm Patterson and his colleagues looked at results across 42 different manufacturing companies. They found links between various aspects of the psychological climate in the company and productivity measures. Because they had been able to collect data over a period of time, they were able to be fairly confident that the climate factors actually caused changes in productivity. They examined many aspects of company climate and found eight specific factors that predicted productivity—in the year *after* they were measured. Productivity was assessed as the financial value of net sales per employee. As an integral part of the study they also controlled previous productivity, company size and industrial sector. The eight climate factors linked to productivity were: supervisory support, concern for employee welfare, skill development, effort, innovation and flexibility, quality, performance feedback and formalization. Concern for employee welfare (well-being) was the climate factor that showed the strongest relationship with subsequent productivity. So, results from manufacturing industry show that organizations derive benefits from being seen to care about the well-being of their employees.

People who work in service industries are in a sector where the challenges are different again. In any service role that involves dealing with customers it is common for employees to be confronted with customers who are irritated or even very angry. Perhaps they have spent a long time on the telephone helpline holding on, standing in a queue waiting for attention or have arrived late at night at a hotel to find that their booking is not recognized. Employees dealing with these kinds of difficult situations have to think on their feet a great deal and sometimes need to use ‘emotional labour’ to exhibit the right emotion for the situation, something we discuss more in Chap. 7. Employees will often need to rely on the support and help of colleagues to solve unexpected problems. To resolve the customers’ concerns, the person on the spot and their colleagues often need to “go the extra mile” and do something that is outside the scope of their normal job. Sometimes this type of

behavior is referred to by organizational psychologists as good “organizational citizenship” or putting in “discretionary effort”. It may also be referred to as “extra role” behavior—because it often involves members of staff carrying out tasks that are not strictly part of their normal role. As a customer it can be very frustrating to see simple things that could be done but are neglected because they are not part of someone’s defined role. One of the authors well remembers visiting a mainline railway station in the United Kingdom on a regular basis. For several weeks he noticed that in the washroom a hand dryer was not functioning. A simple repair with a piece of tape would have made it serviceable until a proper repair could be carried out. But week after week nobody had taken the initiative to do anything. Probably everyone has many examples of similar things. How angry and frustrated the business’ leaders must be to see that their employees are not prepared, or don’t feel able, to step outside their specific role and fix a simple problem. But how often do these same business’ leaders link the problem to the well-being of their members of staff? Guess what? In service organizations where staff well-being is higher, members of staff are more likely to go the extra mile (Moliner et al. 2008); customer satisfaction and service quality have also been shown to be linked to employee well-being (Dorman and Kaiser 2002, Harter et al. 2003).

Given the knowledge that studies have shown links between productivity, customer satisfaction, patient care, service quality and PWB, it is perhaps not surprising that PWB has actually been linked with a very wide range of important outcomes for organizations. First, research has established that PWB is directly correlated with performance. Studies conducted in organizations (Wright and Cropanzano 2000) have revealed positive relationships between levels of PWB and job performance, demonstrating that people with higher levels of PWB perform better at work than those with lower PWB; indeed, the results show that well-being predicts job performance more effectively than job satisfaction does. Recent studies have confirmed this, in a study of 9000 employees in 12 organisations PWB was shown to enable the prediction of performance beyond that achieved by looking only at positive work and job attitudes (Robertson et al. 2012). Figure 2.1 illustrates the strength of the relationship between PWB and (self-reported) productivity levels. The results in Fig. 2.1 come from a sample of 750 employees in the northwest of England—but we have obtained similar results from organizations in many different settings.

As Fig. 2.1 also shows, an increase of one point on the PWB scale (which was measured on a scale from 1 to 5) is associated with an increase in productivity of 8.8%.

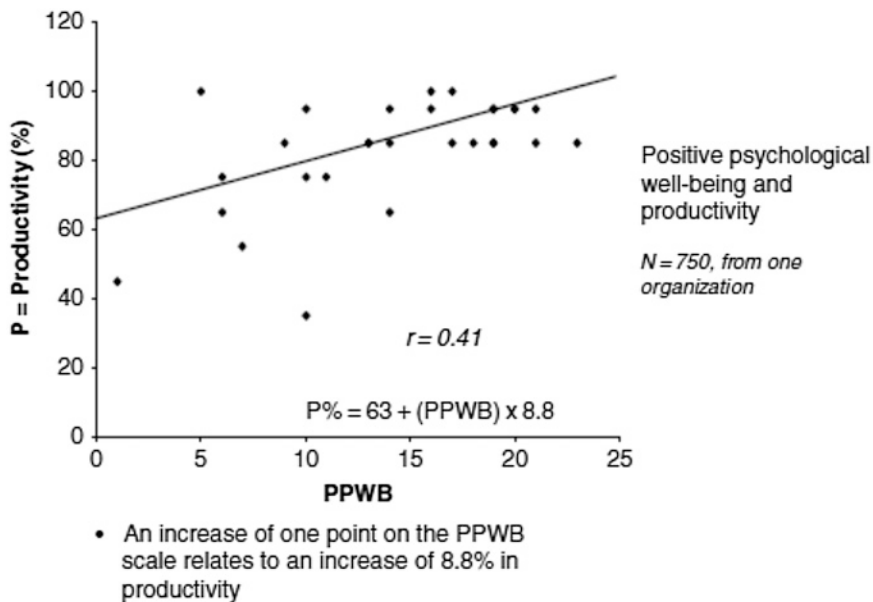


Fig. 2.1 The relationship between PWB and productivity

One large piece of research analyzed data from nearly 8000 separate business units in 36 companies (Harter et al. 2003). They found significant relationships between well-being scores on an employee survey and business unit level outcomes, such as customer satisfaction, productivity, profitability, employee turnover and sickness-absence levels. As well as demonstrating links between well-being and important organizational outcomes, their research reports are interesting in another way, as they illustrate the potential relationships between PWB and employee engagement. Although they discuss their work as an illustration of the “well-being” approach in some of their publications, they also refer to the survey that they use as a measure of engagement-satisfaction. The relationships between PWB, employee engagement and job satisfaction are interesting and important and they are explored more fully in the next chapter of this book.

PWB and “Presenteeism”

Low levels of PWB have obvious consequences for sickness-absence rates in an organization but they also appear to be important when it comes to the interesting phenomenon of presenteeism. Presenteeism is both impor-

Table 2.1 Productivity losses due to sickness presenteeism

Condition	Average productivity loss (%)
Seasonal allergies/allergic rhinitis/hay fever	4.1
Migraine	4.9
Depression	7.6

Source Hemp, P. Harvard Business Review (2004)

tant and somewhat misunderstood. Let's tackle the misunderstanding aspect first. In practice the term seems to be associated with at least three different meanings. One of these refers to people attending even though they are sick. In practice of course, this is quite common. Many people will still attend work when they have a cold or perhaps an ongoing health condition such as migraine or hay fever. Generally when people are sick they perform less effectively. For example, the results in Table 2.1 show the loss of productivity associated with some of the common forms of illness that do not always prevent people from working.

The second meaning that is sometimes given to presenteeism concerns putting in long hours but not actually working all of the time, or leading people to believe that you are working (e.g. leaving a jacket on the back of a chair)—sometimes referred to as putting in “face time”. The third meaning involves working at a reduced level because of other distractions, such as browsing the Internet or playing games online.

As far as research on presenteeism is concerned it is the first type of presenteeism, sickness presenteeism, which has received most attention. Sickness presenteeism due to psychological problems seems to be a particular problem and some reports have estimated that the costs of presenteeism are greater than those due to sickness-absence. The NorthWest Public Health Observatory (2010) reported that the negative outcomes of presenteeism may result in costs for organizations that are twice as much as absenteeism costs, and that presenteeism is more common among higher-paid staff. In 2015 the CIPD Absence Management Report reported that presenteeism had risen for the fifth year in a row, but over half of their survey respondents also reported that no steps had been taken within their organization to try and reduce presenteeism. Which is surprising when you consider the costs involved! The CIPD also reported that employers who experienced increased presenteeism were almost twice as likely to see an associated rise in absence relating to poor PWB, suggesting there is a link between the two. A year on though, although presenteeism was again reported in the 2016 CIPD Absence Management Report as a significant issue for organizations, there

Table 2.2 The prevalence of presenteeism

	Health “Good”	Health “Not good”
No absences	35% (Healthy and present)	28% (Presentees)
Some absences	13% (Healthy but not always present)	24% (Unhealthy and not always present)

was a large increase in the number of organizations stating they were taking steps to tackle presenteeism. This indicates that some organizations are starting to take the issue of presenteeism more seriously.

There is little doubt that presenteeism is quite widespread. Table 2.2 shows some prevalence data for presenteeism for a sample of nearly 40,000 employees in the United Kingdom.

As Table 2.2 shows, some 28% (about 11,000 people) reported some degree of presenteeism. Levels of presenteeism are associated with a number of other factors and further analysis of the results from the sample reported in Table 2.2 showed that for people who report poorer than average levels of PWB presenteeism is even higher (38%).

Workplace Factors and PWB

So, there is a significant amount of research offering support for the idea that organizations in which employee PWB is higher will get better results. Obviously this is important and establishing that higher levels of PWB are linked to important organizational benefits is a key component of the business case for PWB. But once this is established what also becomes important is to understand *how* this relationship works. The research outlined next helps to provide some insights into this.

As well as demonstrating the links between PWB and productivity the researchers who carried out this work also looked at the factors in the workplace that are known to influence employee PWB. Their study (Donald et al. 2005) examined PWB results, across 15 different organizations in the United Kingdom. These organizations were from both the public and the private sector. Two manufacturing plants, a local education authority, a large county council, three police forces, three universities, a prison service and various other service providers were included in the total sample of over 16,000 people. Respondents worked in a range of professional, administrative and manual occupations. The researchers used an earlier version of the well-being survey (ASSET, see Faragher et al. 2004). The survey tool meas-

Table 2.3 Some illustrative factors measured by the ASSET survey tool

ASSET factor	Explanation
Workplace factor: Control and autonomy	The items included in ASSET for this factor focus on the extent to which job holders feel that they have control over how they carry out their work—e.g. involvement in decision-making, whether ideas and suggestions are taken into account
Workplace factor: Work (over)load	The items included in ASSET for this factor focus on the extent to which the workload itself is a source of excessive pressure for an individual—e.g. unrealistic deadlines, unmanageable workload
Organizational outcome: Productivity	This ASSET scale asks people how productive they have felt over the previous 3 months—using a percentage scale—up to 100% productive
Individual outcome: Psychological (ill) health	This scale picks up the extent to which people have experienced common problems—e.g. mood swings, constant tiredness, feeling unable to cope—that are known to be indicators of poor psychological health

ures a range of factors related to well-being and is explained more fully elsewhere in this book (see Chap. 5). For the moment Table 2.3 gives a brief illustration of some of the factors measured by ASSET.

As well as exploring the links between PWB and important organizational outcomes (e.g. this particular study showed that psychological health was linked to individual productivity) research of this kind has looked at the impact that key workplace factors (such as degree of control and autonomy, access to resources and communications) appear to have on psychological health and well-being. The results of this research and other work start to enable us to move beyond a simple statement that higher PWB is linked to better performance, customer satisfaction, organizational citizenship and so on. It enables us to identify the aspects of the workplace that drive levels of PWB. The links between workplace factors and PWB are fully explored in Chap. 7 of this book. The identification of the workplace factors that influence PWB is the first of two very important questions that need to be addressed when considering the role of PWB at work from the perspective of the organization. The second question focuses on how higher levels of

PWB lead to better outcomes for organizations. These two questions are of considerable practical relevance to anyone interested in harnessing the benefits of PWB for an organization. Understanding the workplace factors that influence PWB enables actions to be taken that can improve the PWB of a workforce. Not being clear about the key factors that influence PWB leaves the leadership of an organization in the dark about what to do to improve or maintain the PWB of their employees. Is it best to improve pay, or are supportive work relationships more important? What about freedom and autonomy to do a job in the way an employee thinks is best—is this an important factor in determining PWB?

Researchers have been interested in the workplace factors that influence PWB for decades—and through the research conducted, they have been able to develop a pretty clear idea of the factors that are important. Researchers interested in the impact of workplace factors on PWB initially focused on a few specific factors. These factors make perfect sense from an intuitive perspective. The first factor concerns the demands placed on people at work. When people are confronted with excessive demands, over a long period, PWB is likely to be damaged. This much is fairly obvious but it is really important to recognize that lower demands do not automatically lead to higher levels of PWB. To understand this point, consider how it might feel to go to work and have nothing at all to do—imagine if no one made any demands on you and there was no requirement for you to do anything at all! When asked to consider this scenario most people's initial reaction (especially if they have a busy and demanding job) is to say, "What bliss". When asked to consider how they would feel about this same scenario being repeated day after day the reaction changes—indeed many people say that they would not last long in such a job and would need to move to somewhere where they could feel useful; and, of course, this is the point: it is the demands of work that make us feel worthwhile and useful. Meeting these demands provides satisfaction, especially if they have been challenging. What this means is that the relationship between work demands and PWB is not entirely straightforward. It is certainly not the case that reducing work demands will lead to lower PWB, sometimes the opposite is required and more demanding work will improve people's PWB. This is good news for organizations and it also provides us with another insight into why there is such a good relationship between the PWB of its members of staff and the overall performance of an organization.

Just as it's true that reducing demands does not automatically improve PWB, it is also the case that organizations will not achieve good results by constantly increasing demands on people. The diagram in Fig. 2.2 illustrates

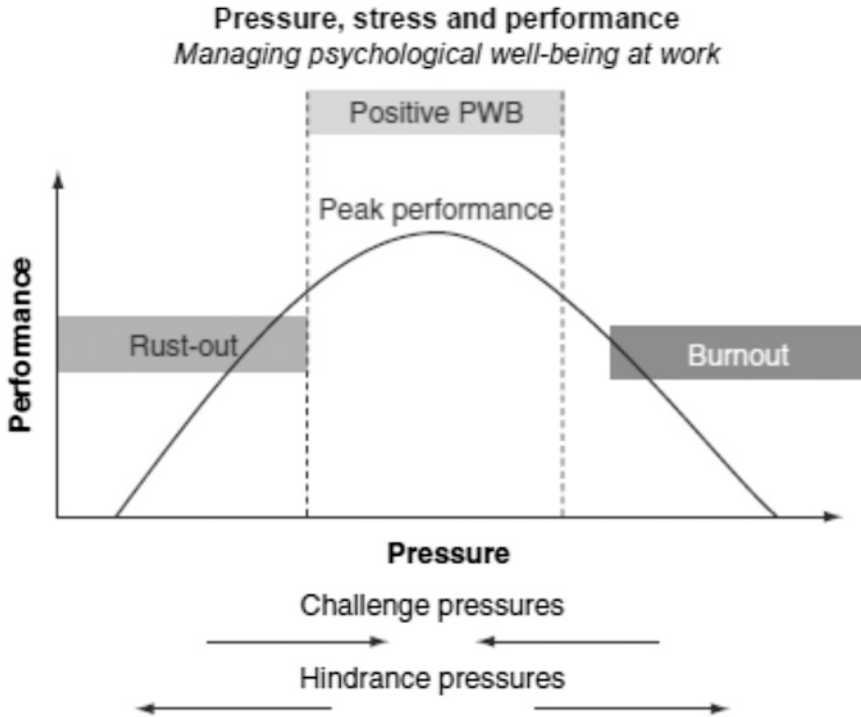


Fig. 2.2 The pressure performance curve

this point. When the pressure (e.g. demands of the job or internal drive to perform) is low, performance will not be at its maximum. As the pressure increases, performance increases but as pressure increases even further it becomes too great—and performance actually begins to suffer. Performance under high pressure may be damaged because the pace of work is too intense, because there are too many things to be done, insufficient resources to do them or a whole range of factors.

Initial research focused on the idea that if people had more control over how they carried out their work, this would enable them to mitigate some of the demands and pressures of the job. For example, high demands and high pressure might be easier to cope with—and even be quite motivating—if you have significant control and discretion over how to do the work. Things like being able to choose times for breaks, working from home/working flexibly, deciding how to go about a piece of work and so on are all part of the general idea of control. The support and resources available to someone have also been proposed as important factors in determining how people respond to work demands. Support from co-workers, support

from the boss, resources and equipment and up-to-date information are all examples of workplace factors that have been shown to influence how people respond to work demands. A distinction can be made between challenge and hindrance stressors with challenge stressors seen as having the potential to promote growth and achievement whereas hindrance stressors are seen as potentially damaging to goal attainment. Researchers have proposed that challenge and hindrance stressors might differentially affect health and well-being. For example a recent study shows that control and support can help to buffer the impact of job stressors on job related anxiety and health but only for hindrance stressors (Dawson et al. 2016). We talk more about challenge and hindrance stressors in Chap. 7. Research to understand how work demands, control, support, resources and other factors all interact to influence PWB is continuing and theories and ideas will continue to be developed and evaluated.

A simple model of the key workplace factors that influence PWB is given in Chap. 7. In particular six core factors are described and related to real jobs and areas of work using examples. The six core factors are: resources and communication; control; work–life balance/workload; job security and change; work relationships; and job conditions. Other important topics covered in Chap. 7 include the impact of management and leadership and the design of jobs and work.

For now, let's return to the primary focus of this chapter—the impact that PWB can have on organizational performance. So far, it should be clear that there are clear links between the PWB of members of a workforce and key organizational outcomes, such as customer satisfaction, patient care, employee turnover and levels of sickness-absence. As we have seen in the previous section of this chapter, specific workplace factors such as control, the availability of resources and work demands are all important in understanding what influences PWB for people at work. Understanding the workplace factors that influence PWB is essential and useful; crucially, it tells an organization that wants to improve the PWB of its workforce which factors are likely to be important. But there is still an important unanswered question about the relationship between PWB and the performance of an organization—why does an organization in which employees have higher levels of PWB perform better? Of course the simple answer to this question is to say that its employees will be more productive, will be sick less often, perform better and relate to customers better. All of that is true but it doesn't really explain what it is that members of staff with higher levels of PWB will do that is different, or why.

It seems likely that the answer to this question lies in the recently developed and rapidly growing field of positive psychology. Historically psychology has been much more interested in negative issues than positive ones. In 2000 it was noted that the research literature contains something like 15 times as many articles about negative topics, such as negative emotions (Myers 2000) compared with positive ones. Negative organizational outcomes have received a similarly disproportionate amount of attention with one of the leading journals in the health psychology field publishing 15 times more articles about negative organizational outcomes, compared with positive ones. The field of positive psychology has been developed partly in response to this overwhelmingly negative mindset. Positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups and institutions. The effectiveness of positive psychology was indicated in a review of 51 positive psychology interventions in clinical settings which reported that cultivating positive behaviours, feelings and cognitions is shown to significantly enhance well-being (Sin and Lyubomirsky 2009). It's important to recognize, from the outset, that positive psychology is a serious attempt to develop a scientific and evidence-based approach to this field of study. Positive psychology is most definitely NOT the soft, under-researched, rather unfocused philosophical approach that is associated with being falsely positive, standing in front of a mirror and affirming that you are a wonderful person and so on. The founders of positive psychology are serious scientists who conduct their research with rigour and publish in peer-reviewed journals. Before using the findings from positive psychology to understand how people with higher levels of PWB benefit their organizations, let's get the flavor of this exciting research area by looking at some of the findings that have emerged since its beginnings not much over 15 years ago.

No introduction to positive psychology would be complete without mention of Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania, considered by many to be the founder of the field. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) provide a handy summary of some of the interesting findings from positive psychology (see Table 2.4). As they note, many of the findings are not of the "my grandmother already knew it" variety!

There are many links between the research emerging from positive psychology and PWB at work but one of the most important ideas concerns the role that positive emotions and a positive sense of purpose play in building and broadening people's psychological resources. Barbara Fredrickson and her colleagues have carried out ground breaking research that shows how

Table 2.4 Some findings from positive psychology

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- ✓ Women who flashed a Duchenne (genuine) smile in their yearbook photos as freshmen have more marital satisfaction 25 years later
 - ✓ Brief raising of positive mood enhances creative thinking and makes doctors more accurate and faster to come up with the proper liver diagnosis
 - ✓ In business meetings a ratio of greater than 2.9:1 for positive to negative statements predicts economic flourishing
 - ✓ Among 96 men who had had their first heart attack, 15 of the 16 most pessimistic men died of cardiovascular disease over the next decade, while only 5 of the 16 most optimistic died
-

the experience of positive emotions serves to broaden the scope of people's attention, thought processes and actions. In other words, experiencing positive emotions is not just a fleeting pleasant feeling, the experience actually enhances the way we think and act and improves our psychological capabilities. Next time you have a good laugh remember this, especially if it comes during a difficult meeting or period of work! Further research has also shown that the broadening effect of positive emotions leads to an upward positive spiral (Fredrickson and Joiner 2002). As Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) put it, "... experiences of positive emotions also increase the odds that people will feel good in the future ..."; as predicted by Fredrickson's broaden and build theory, "... this upward spiral is linked to the broadened thinking that accompanies positive emotions" (p. 175). It seems likely that this building of psychological capital may be at the heart of the results that are obtained by organizations that nurture the PWB of their members of staff. People with higher levels of PWB also appear to have better psychological resources—they are more optimistic, more resilient in the face of setbacks and have a stronger belief in their own ability to cope with things (Avey et al. 2010). Some psychologists refer to these qualities, that are associated with higher levels of PWB, as psychological capital—PsyCap for short (see Box 2.1). A review of 51 studies including more than twelve thousand employees reported positive links between PsyCap and desirable employee attitudes such as commitment, job satisfaction and well-being. Links were also revealed between PsyCap and undesirable attitudes such as turnover intentions, cynicism, job stress and anxiety (Avey et al. 2011). A book published by Luthans et al. in 2015 details recent research looking at PsyCap and describes how there is much support for the usefulness of PsyCap from across the globe. In addition to well-being, PsyCap has been linked to other posi-

tive employee attitudes, behaviours and performance, and to service quality and customer satisfaction. If you are interested in finding out more about PsyCap then this book would be a good place to start as it describes the history of PsyCap as well as the up to date research conducted in the area.

Box 2.1 Psychological capital

High levels of psychological capital (PsyCap) are positively correlated with positive organizational outcomes such as employee satisfaction, performance and effective organizational change as well as lower levels of absenteeism. In line with the “broaden and build” theory, PsyCap also has a self-reinforcing effect on the individual; positive outcomes increase perceived self-efficacy and feelings of hope, and consequently overall PsyCap.

Some of the key factors that have been identified as contributing to overall PsyCap are:

- **Self-efficacy**—having the confidence to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks
- **Optimism**—making a positive attribution about succeeding now and in the future (see also Chap. 8)
- **Hope**—persevering toward goals and when necessary redirecting paths to goals in order to succeed
- **Resiliency**—when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond to attain success (see also Chap. 8)

It is a useful construct for organizations because PsyCap, measured by the PCQ (PsyCap Questionnaire), can be developed by increasing scores on the four underlying factors.

Simple web-based—microintervention—training programs (typically lasting approximately 2 hours) that aim to develop the four aspects of PsyCap have been demonstrated to do so effectively. At the core of these microinterventions is the philosophy that the training should be highly personalized and interactive.

It seems then that strong underlying psychological resources and good PWB go together. We already know from material covered in Chap. 1 of this book that higher PWB is associated with a range of behaviors and psychological processes linked to success, including positive self-perceptions, positive judgments of others, performance on complex mental tasks, creativity, flexibility and originality. These behaviors and processes are ones that the leadership team of any organization would wish for in their staff. Such behaviors lead more or less directly to some of the positive organizational outcomes that have been shown to be linked to PWB. The picture that emerges then is one where an important network of factors, PsyCap, PWB and positive behaviors and psychological processes are all linked together to provide organizations that nurture the PWB of their members of staff with a range of positive outcomes.

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