

PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL IN MILITARY: ITS IMPORTANCE TO MALAYSIAN ARMY FIELD COMMAND WEST AND WAYS TO ENHANCE

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The study on modern psychology was pioneered by Wilhelm Wundt in 1861 whose emphasis revolved around the aspects of sensation and perception, attention, feeling, reaction and association (Schultz, 2011). Psychology is defined by Henriques (2011) as the science of human mind and their corresponding mental behaviour beyond a generic stance to provide professional directions for the greater good of mankind development. Speaking about human mind and their corresponding mental behaviour, Vogt et al. (2005) asserted that individuals who experience continuous exposure to stressors such as hazardous and compromised work conditions are likely to be associated with poor mental health.

Given the nature of work in the military, it is undeniable that soldiers too are likely to be susceptible to this condition. About 36% of Spanish soldiers and around 16% to 29% of United States troops face mental health issues which affect their wellbeing and performance (Varas & Silgo, 2021), serving as a foundation to approach military from a psychological field of view. Psychological capital (psyc cap) known as positive psychology is a branch of psychology that nurtures the development of positive state of mind through **hopefulness**, **efficacy**, **resilience** and **optimism** (Luthans, 2012). It enhances troops wellbeing and performance by fortifying their psychological wellbeing as a whole (Varas & Silgo, 2021).

According to Luthans (2012), **hopefulness** is the positive motivational or cognitive state which boosts the willpower of an individual while **efficacy** is an individual's conviction about his or her abilities to successfully execute a specific task within a given context. **Resilience** is the determination to overcome challenges and **optimism** enables an individual perceive and associate

positive meaning to challenging situations. As a whole, all of these facets of psychological capital contribute to uplifted performance and engagement explaining their importance (Peterson et al., 2011).

However, a preliminary study conducted by (Chandran, 2023) disclosed that the overall level of Psychological Capital of soldiers serving under the command of Malaysian Army Malaysian Army Field Command West (AFCW) is only **59.3%** with efficacy scoring the lowest score of **54.7%** which otherwise uplifted would serve as a hinderance to produce a “**majority good**” force as aspired by the commander of AFCW, Lt Jen Dato’ Tengku Muhammad Fauzi bin Tengku Ibrahim.

Generally, psychological capital is important in the military to boost the self-perception of soldiers about themselves primarily and their surrounding secondarily which in this case is the organisation. When a soldier begins to attain positive psychological awakening, they are believed to be highly motivated, confident, efficient and engaged to the organisation. The organisation on the other hand will greatly benefit from the positive awakening of soldiers in terms of enhanced efficiency, commitment and uplifted performance ultimately. As an organisation that is required to safeguard the nation and its interests all round the clock, having highly optimistic, efficient, resilient and hopeful workforce will ensure the effectivity of operations, training and professionalism.

Hopefulness or simply hope, is defined by Hope Theory as an individual’s cognitive state which dictates the level of drive and vigour that he or she experiences towards the surrounding or the organisation (Snyder, 2002). The level of drive and vigour possessed improves their motivation in carrying out their tasks and duties. When they are more hopeful, they appear more motivated and filled with energy to meet their goals making it highly important for the

organisation. Hopefulness provides individuals a sense of clarity in accomplishing given tasks and meeting organisational goals as a whole (Milona, 2020). A hopeful individual is always sensitive to his or her surrounding which enables him or her to always be aware of changes and predict anomalies and pitfalls. By being able to forecast irregularities and changes, aided by their positive motivation, they are able to maintain a high level of positive motivation and superior productivity.

According to Forsyth (1990), it is important for individual to be highly hopeful (psychologically) as it triggers their problem-solving capabilities and creativity. Hopefulness allows an individual to be foresighted, preparing them to face predicaments at all time. Cognitively, it develops their responsiveness to any changes in their expected outcome which steers them away from being struck by shock should irregularities happen. This has to be nurtured among soldiers given the highly volatile and extremely fluid nature of work (especially operational) in the military (Clemons & Santamaria, 2002). Secondary to not giving up when bogged down by impediment, responsive thinking and immediate response is a trait that a soldier should possess to ensure the continuity of an operation. The swift response of Malaysian troops in saving handful US troops under heavy fire and mass casualties during **Bakara Market Operation** in Somalia in the year 1993 is an evident of high level of hopefulness displayed by Malaysian troops.

Efficacy refers to the conviction held by an individual to accomplish a specific task successfully (Bandura, 1997a). It largely relies on one's self-perception about what he or she is capable of doing and becoming. Their self-perception improves their self-esteem and confidence in performing a task which subsequently uplifts their productivity as whole. A highly confident individual is also highly aware of his or her capabilities and shortcomings in relative to the contextual challenges that they face. It enables them to gauge the situation in hand without

prejudice and push themselves to their limits in order to achieve ultimate goals to succeed. Parallel to these theoretical claims, a study conducted by Gurbuz and Yildirim (2019) on Turkish Army Aviation units discovered that high level of efficacy relates to uplifted performance at work in Turkish Army Aviation units. That being said, the importance of high level of efficacy among soldiers indeed is paramount.

With regard to formerly derived theoretical concepts and findings, the importance of efficacy in general terms and the army specifically is a subject of no query at all. However, the preliminary finding of Chandran (2023) reports that self-efficacy is the lowest among all other dimensions of psychological capital in Malaysian AFCW. It is of utmost importance for soldiers of Malaysian Army to maximise their efficacy as it will enable them to think highly of their capability and credibility in performing their tasks and duties. High levels of efficacy enhances their efficiency and competency in performing their roles. It also boosts their intellectual capabilities to focus on their intrinsic resources such as strength, mental strength, spirituality for the better good of the organisation. Ultimately, it negates the thoughts of unhealthy activities such as abuse of drugs or absenteeism and subsequently contributes to becoming a force comprising of **majority good** soldiers as aspired by the commander of Malaysian AFCW.

Resilience is a trait that is typically associated with success and wellbeing which is not limited to the context of psychology alone. It is often related to the strength that is needed by someone to recover from trauma. However, under the light of psychological capital, resilience is defined as the capacity to rebound from not only adversity, conflict or challenges but also overwhelming responsibilities (Luthans, 2002). Resilience boils down to the perseverance held by an individual in giving out their best performance even when circumstances are against them. This trait particularly is critical for the continuity of sustained performance and success of organisations especially those that are of volatile in nature such as the military. Little is known or

investigated about resilience in soldiers as soldiers are predominantly stereotyped as strong and resilient.

Resilience is of vital importance for soldiers as it amplifies their perseverance in times where challenges and obstructions arise. Resilience, through high levels of confidence and self-esteem enhances soldier's perseverance, creativity and problem-solving skills which benefits the organisation in moving forward and subsequently rising as a credible force. Varas et al. (2019) who compared a group of highly resilient Spanish Army to those otherwise reported that the former is about 15% more efficient than the latter. Hence, it can be presumed that resilience is the key to a high-performing and competent workforce that is capable of sustaining and striving through tough situations. A highly confident soldier has great conviction on his abilities and capabilities at the face of challenges which enables him or her to respond in ways that are cognitively and physically swift to overcome it. High resilience in soldiers uplifts their self-awareness of their abilities and shortcomings which allows them to assess and evaluate a situation accurately before responding. Enhanced self-awareness coupled with high confidence and perseverance amplifies their creativity and acceptance towards challenges.

Optimism under the light of psychological capital relates to the capacity of an individual to associate a positive reasoning and approach to explain certain events that take place. In other words, optimism is the positive interpretation of specific events and incidents. A psychologically optimistic individual attaches a positive notion to his or her daily encounters, narrates past in a positive manner and is optimistic about how future might unfold. It is essential for individuals to possess this capital as it helps them to believe that highly desirable events are likely to happen and they are within control. A study conducted by Mohsenabadi et al. (2021) on Iranian Army articulates that optimism among their soldiers contributed to their greater job satisfaction. Their tendency to appreciate their surrounding and the organisation they work for amplifies their

satisfaction towards their job, affective commitment towards the organisation and their intrinsic wellbeing.

An **optimistic** soldier sees an opportunity in every challenge. He or she is always energetic and positive about their surrounding and organisation. Therefore, a positively oriented force is optimistic about the directions and regulations which enables easy implementation of new procedures, regulations and direction from top to bottom. An optimistic soldier is more welcoming towards the decisions that are made by their organisation and wholeheartedly loyal due to their (affective) commitment towards their organisation and their love towards their service which smoothens administration and organisational performance as a whole. Optimistic soldiers are highly open towards training as they optimistically believe that training is an opportunity given by the organisation for them to perform better and contribute to the organisation. In addition to that, they are also loyal and ever ready to be deployed for the sake of the organisation and the country. They highly believe that serving the military and the nation is the best opportunity to employ all the skills and abilities that they possess as well as to prove their loyalty.

Thus far, the importance of individual dimensions of psychological capital have been described. However, as psychological capital delivers a combinational outcome of its dimensions, it is essential to scrutinise the importance of psychological capital holistically as a variable on its own. According to Avey et al. (2008), psychological capital helps to nurture positive organisation behaviour among individuals in an organisational setting. Positive organisational behaviour among workforce forms a workforce that is highly committed to the organisation, satisfied with their job and empowered in performing their roles that stays away from quitting which in return maximises the competency and productivity of the organisation. In the military, it uplifts the

credibility of the force to a whole different level given the regimental and physical endurance that is integral to soldiers.

On a separate note, Smith et al. (2010) attested that psychological capital is a major precursor of greater psychological wellbeing. Psychological capital immensely affects individual's psychological wellbeing such a way that they feel psychologically safe, well taken care of and treated fairly. Individuals who perceive greater psychological wellbeing are likely to be more open in communicating their needs and their willingness in going above and beyond in performing their roles for the betterment of the organisation. As far as the military is concerned, due to its highly dangerous and stressful nature soldiers are highly susceptible to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Blais, 2021) which can be alleviated by managing their psychological wellbeing effectively through psychological capital.

However, organisational climate and setting plays a huge role in not only preserving but also enhancing psychological capital primarily and wellbeing secondarily. Several studies in the past has revealed the significant association of organisational support in the proliferation of psychological capital in its workforce (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Pinna et al., 2020; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). The support that is provided by an organisation creates a mental perception of being appreciated and taken care of among employees which enhances their hopefulness, efficacy, resilience and optimism that pushes them to go above and beyond for the greater good of their organisation. Thus, it is important for organisations to always be on the lookout for ways to enhance the level of psychological capital of their workforce especially in the military.

Leadership is typically the quickest way to invigorate psychological capital. According to Bass (1999) and Smith et al. (2009), a good practice of leadership develops trust and healthy exchange between leaders and subordinates at every level in an organisation which makes

employees feels psychologically safe and protected serving under a specific leader. Furthermore, authenticity of leaders enhances their conviction about the direction and administration of a leader which subsequently enhances their motivation and perception about forthcoming events (Jang, 2022). Acknowledging soldiers as distinct individuals, appreciating even the slightest contribution of theirs and openly communicating with them makes them feel appreciated, significant and psychologically safe within a formation or unit. This, in return motivates them to perform above and beyond for the unit.

Parallel to leadership practices, Human Resources Management (HRM) practices too plays a vital role in improving psychological capital among soldiers. Fairness in treatment and authenticity of leaders in practicing integrity sets a benchmark for hopefulness among subordinates (Gardner et al., 2005). As far as military is concerned, being treated fairly and given due recognition (or reward) stimulates the feeling of being appreciated and recognised which motivates a soldier to strive to harder for the sake of his unit. Integrity of a leader on the other hand amplifies the feeling of (psychological) safety of a soldier in serving under the command of a leader and being hopeful that he or she will only be led towards goodness under the command of the particular leader. Therefore, HRM practices such as **talent spotting, performance-based reward and integrity-based culture** must be incorporated in the military to achieve a workforce that is manned by **majority good** soldiers.

As far as enhancing self-efficacy is concerned, Bandura (1997) ruled out that communication is one of the most effective ways psychologically. A constructive interaction and communication should at all time take place in every organisation for subordinates to be motivated and feel good about their abilities. Communication does not stop with just motivating subordinates. It has to reach farther across an organisation via constructive motivation and persuasion as a reflection of every actions and achievements of subordinates as a mean of

showing appreciation for their service. According to Stajkovic and Luthans (1998), constant exposure to constructive communication and interaction develops psychological arousal cognitively within employees that they could do better and survive challenges which pushes them to perform better with time.

According to Malaysian Chief of Army, Jeneral Datuk Seri Mohammad bin Ab Rahman, the synergy of **Man, Machine and Method** is the foundation of a mighty force that will never back down at any cost. That being said, it is apparent that man or human resource is the most valuable asset of any organisation. Men operate machines which aids in the derivation of methods (or plans). Therefore, the establishment of a formidable workforce must be the organisational focus at all levels for the failure of man will result in poor utilisation of machines and finally the derivation of failing methods. Taking this into consideration, Rocket Artillery Brigade as part of Malaysian Army generally and AFCW specifically had recently initiated **Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) Familiarisation Course** among its crews to develop their self-efficacy as part of their adaptation of the synergy of Man, Machine and Method approach as MLRS crews or subject matter experts.

In addition to HRM practices which typically garners Psychological Capital, emphasis on Human Resource Development (HRD) is the most valuable investment of an organisation which intends to enhance the resiliency of its workforce (Masten, 2001; Masten & Reed, 2002; Meneghel et al., 2016). Individuals are generally resilient when they are equipped with sufficient knowledge and tools to anticipate and overcome challenges. It is ultimately the responsibility of organisations to nurture and prepare their workforce to be able to anticipate and overcome challenges. Organisations must constantly revise and restructure their training design in accordance to the changes that are taking effect in their external environment before they start affecting their internal or core affairs. As training is revised and workforce is constantly exposed

to challenges, competency of workforce grows in anticipating, evaluating and overcoming challenges. Such achievement of the workforce subsequently delivers success to the organisation.

Similarly, training is also the key aspect of HRD in the military. Training is an integral domain of military that it is made a routine. The aim of training in the military is to keep troops fit and combat ready at all time. However, as far as psychological capital in general and resilience in specific is concerned, training design and modules must be constantly revised to ensure that troops are formed and trained exclusively to meet current nature of threat. In other words, it is known as **“preparing the right man for the right job”**. In moulding soldiers to become more resilient, training at fundamental levels must focus at self enhancement. It is necessary to revise the training modules in order to place more emphasis on challenge seeking trait development in individuals who are serving in the military. It is imperative that soldiers be placed in challenging operational environments in order to improve their capacity for quick decision making and reaction, which would ultimately lead to an increase in their level of resilience. If each individual soldier is able to improve their fundamental soldiering skills, their combined efforts will ultimately result in victory.

Optimism is the final component of psychological capital. According to Steinhilber (2017), optimism is the resultant perception that is processed by the mind of an individual with respect to the perceptions that are held towards the series of events that occur around him or her and that can be influenced by a variety of factors. This resultant perception is known as the optimistic outlook. It is essential for management at all levels of an organisation to precisely address and capitalise on these factors so that the organisation and its employees both come out ahead. When factors of context are taken into account, the level of optimism that an individual feel is most significantly impacted by the individual's perception of the support and wellbeing provided by his organisation. This perception is held by the individual towards his organisation

(Biricik, 2020; Tras et al., 2022). An employee whose wellbeing is constantly supported and taken care of by the organisation will grow more fond, affectionate and committed towards the organisation.

Similarly, soldiers who perceive to be highly supported by his or her unit in the military will be more optimistic with regard to his or her organisation. Generally, there are 2 ways of approaching this in the military. The first step is by focusing on the being wellbeing of soldiers. Wellbeing of soldiers can be taken care of prioritising their welfare which is stressed by the present Chief of Army, Jeneral Datuk Seri Mohammad bin Ab Rahman as **army community wellbeing** (kesejahteraan warga) in his speech. By catering their wellbeing, the fundamental needs as outlined by Maslow's Hierarchy of Need will be fulfilled and their loyalty gained. Secondly, undivided perception of support can be garnered by providing soldiers with religious, spiritual, and ethical support in order to establish a mutuality in the practise of military ethos. This can help establish a sense of mutuality in the practise of military ethos. The mutuality of shared values and beliefs establishes resonation between soldiers and the organisation, which in turn elevates a soldier's perception of support in the first place, and optimism in the long run.

Concentrating on each subsets of psychological capital (hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism) facilitates junior and immediate commanders at unit level in harvesting the best out of their subordinates. By picking and choosing each of the subsets, immediate commanders get to instil the specific the value that they would like their subordinates to possess in order to deliver expected results as per the requirement of tasks in hand. For instance, at unit level immediate commanders may expect to equip their subordinates with resilience capital alone in order to expedite the success of immediate tasks at hand. Nevertheless, fortification of more than one or all the subsets of psychological capital at unit level must be encouraged. However, it is not the same scenario at an organisational level. At higher levels of the organisation, such as formations and above, the importance of psychological capital as a separate unit of capital needs to be

emphasised. The practises of HRM and HRD initiatives need to be reviewed and analysed so that they can comprehensively integrate all of the different subsets of psychological capital. This will allow for increased output and better leverage. It is important to keep in mind that soldiers at a formation level come from a variety of different backgrounds, including combat, combat support, and combat service support, which necessitates the completion of a variety of tasks at a variety of different levels simultaneously.

At even higher levels such as the Army, psychological capital must be perceived as an important capital for the proliferation of force wellbeing, competency enhancement and performance amplification. The Malaysian Army's Psychological Branch should study military psychology to improve its guidance on how to use this capital for the benefit of the organisation. Execution must be decentralised at formation levels and below as they are closer to the troops and have a better understanding of their well-being while directives and guidance must be centralised at the army level to maintain synchronisation. Psychologists in service must be appointed at formation levels to oversee, lead, and supervise psychological capital management at their formations and report to Army Headquarters periodically to facilitate future researches to improve soldiers' wellbeing across the service.

In a nutshell, psychological capital is a higher order core construct that integrates the various higher order capacities within a soldier, not only additively but also perhaps, synergistically. Therefore, the impact of investing in, developing, and managing overall psychological capital on performance and attitudinal outcomes is expected to be scaled at the unit level or positive psychological capacities that comprise it. This is due to the fact that psychological capital is comprised of a number of different components. At the end of the day, a soldier who possesses a high level of psychological capital will demonstrate a high level of positive organisation-wide behaviour in terms of voluntary actions, participation, and

accountability. However, the degree to which a soldier's psychological capital is strengthened is greatly dependent on the support that is given by the organisation and service. This support will be of great benefit to the organisation in terms of maximising the soldier's overall performance. In due course, a **majority good** workforce as aspired by **Lt Jen Dato' Tengku Muhammad Fauzi bin Tengku Ibrahim**, the Commander of Army Field Command West will be able to be attained.

(3905 Words)

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