



# Women's Optimism: Role of Psychological Climate and Psychological Capital

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## Abstract

**Background:** Psychological capital is considered as the basis of sustainable competitive advantage in today's organizations and can be developed and managed with minimal costs compared to tangible assets and can lead to significant results.

**Objectives:** This quantitative research was carried out to determine the direct and indirect impact of psychological capital on female's organizational optimism with psychological climate acting as the mediating variable.

**Methods:** This study was a descriptive correlational research that included 45 females, who were employed at Farhangian University between the academic year of 2016 and 2017. A sample of 45 was determined using the census method. Data were collected using a standard questionnaires, including psychological capital questionnaire, psychological climate questionnaire, and organizational optimism questionnaire. The reliability of the instruments was measured using Cronbach's alpha, combined reliability and factor load, and the validity of the instruments was determined using a convergent and divergent validity method. Cronbach's alpha test obtained a value of 0.98, 0.96, and 0.93. The data were analyzed by the structural equation modeling and Smart PLS2 software.

**Results:** The results indicated that the female's organizational optimism had a mean value of  $3.46 \pm 0.75$ . Also, on average, the participants were  $35 \pm 0.43$  years old and had  $25 \pm 0.38$  years of work experience. Psychological capital and female's organizational optimism are antecedents and consequences of psychological climate among students, respectively, and psychological climate has a significant mediating role on the relationship between psychological capital and female's organizational optimism; 53% of the total effect of female's organizational optimism was indirectly explained by the psychological climate ( $P < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusions:** The findings suggest the need of implementing programs, which strengthen women's psychological capital in order to improve psychological climate and achieve a greater organizational optimism.

**Keywords:** Psychological Climate, Women's Organizational Optimism, Psychological Capital

## 1. Background

A quick glance at management paradigms shift from the economic capital to human capital and social capital and ultimately to positive psychological capital reflects the fact that aside from physical capital (money, labor, and machinery), human capital (knowledge, skills and employee's experience), social capital as a network of relationships possessed by individuals with others, and ultimately, psychological capital (positive affection, vitality, optimism, and organizational trust) are regarded as the basis for sustainable competitive advantage in organizations (1). According to Luthans et al., the optimal composite of positive psychology, human capital and social capital, are treated as an inevitable requirement for the creation of positive organizational behaviors and claim that, in addition to the ca-

pabilities of social and human capital, psychological capital is characterized by a psychological state of development. In other words, similar to human capital and social capital, psychological capital is among intangible organizational capital that can be managed with a minimum cost, and can result in significant outcomes and benefits (2). According to Luthans (1999), psychological capital is an interconnected composite construct consisting of four perceptual - cognitive elements of hope, optimism, self - efficacy and resilience. The results of studies show that these four components are psychological states rather than psychological traits. In other words, not all of these traits exist in all people. Therefore, genetic characteristics are those that are to a large extent determined by genes, where as psychological characteristics in the form of psycholog-

ical states include behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be developed through learning (short - term training programs, on job activities, focused and short - term interventions). The term optimism is one of the constructs of psychological capital that has been driven from the French word “optimism”; it is rooted in the Latin word optimum “greatest success” and (optimus) means “the best”. In Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, optimum means one expects the best possible outcome from any given situation; in the Oxford dictionary, it means hopefulness and confidence about the future or the success of something and having a tendency toward desirable or hopeful perspective (3). Several definitions have been provided for this word: Optimism is defined by Seligman (2000) as an attributional style that explains positive events in terms of personal, permanent, and pervasive causes and negative events in terms of external, temporary, and situation - specific ones. A pessimistic explanatory style does the opposite, thus undermining the favorable impact of successes and exacerbating the destructive potential of failures. As a result, these different and explanatory styles create positive expectations in optimistic individuals, who persuade them to achieve goals and help them adopt flexible behaviors in dealing with problems, while pessimists face obstacles due to their doubts and negative expectations (4). Carver and Scheier defined optimism as anticipating good things to happen in the future. In another definition, optimism means the tendency to observe the positive aspect of each given situation and expecting a favorable outcome in each event (5). Therefore, this definition focuses on the positive outlook and the expectation of a desirable outcome (6). Optimism is also described as a state or attitude, which reflects expectations about the future and is socially pleasant and is considered a privilege or pleasure (7). A general overview of articles and research done in the field of optimism indicates that optimism is of various types, including dispositional optimism (8), unrealistic optimism (9), trait optimism, state optimism (10), learned optimism and organizational optimism (11). The results of studies on the role of identity theory (12-14) suggest that the attitude and behavior of individuals in an organization depends on their role in the organization and individuals seek to validate facts, even if their perception was an inaccurate belief of a fact. Hence, here the beliefs of individuals play the main role and they are influential on their work attitudes; in some studies, these belief and positive attitudes in the organization have been termed as women’s organizational optimism. In other words, women’s organizational optimism is a positive and desirable assessment of the future development of the organization and could improve operational efficiency, attract high - capacity staff, respond to changes and ultimately reach high profitability in the or-

ganization (11). In this regard, the results of the current research reveal that core self - evaluation is one of the factors affecting perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, decisions, and activities of individuals in various fields of work and life, which are related to many important and varied consequences of job and non - job associated activities, such as job satisfaction, motivation, job performance, stress, happiness, life satisfaction, leadership, job search behaviors, etc. (15). The climate concept is considered as one of the factors affecting core self - evaluation (16). Climate has been defined as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, and has always been difficult for organizations to examine. An overview of studies conducted in this regard show that two types of climate were identified in the organization (organizational climate and psychological climate); the former is focused on the organization and the latter on the individual. Although both types of climates are considered as descriptive and multidimensional phenomena of the nature of employee perceptions of their experiences in the organization, evidence suggests that the psychological climate is distinct from other related concepts. In this regard, Jones and James (1979) demonstrate that psychological climate is a perceptual and measurable concept at the personal level and represents a cognitive analysis of organizational structure. In other words, psychological climate is an individual trait and represents individual judgment about the organizational environment and is distinguishable from organizational climate to some extent (16), and has been recently regarded as individual employee perceptions of their work environment (5). In other words, the psychological climate is in fact the perception of individuals from their workplace, while the organizational climate is the accumulation of these individual perceptions and knowledge (17). Therefore, according to Jones and James (1979), psychological climate is measured at the individual level and organizational climate is measured at an organizational level that has been verified and confirmed by many organizational researchers (18). A study by Levine, Lippit, and White (1939), entitled as “The study of the climate created by different leadership styles and the implications of these different climates on the behavior and attitude of group members”, showed that organizational behavior and leadership behaviors play a significant role in the formation of the created climate (19). The primary motivation for researchers to investigate the mediating role of psychological climate was based on the fact that psychological climate reflects employee perceptions of their organizational environment in general and is able to moderate the behavioral and attitude responses of the staff and the organization. Review of the literature revealed that no study was found to specifically examine the impact of psychological capital and the psychological

climate on women's organizational optimism. Therefore, the present study was conducted to investigate women's organizational optimism as it is believed that the components of psychological capital and psychological climate have been effective on women's organizational optimism and have the ability to explain and anticipate women's organizational optimism.

## 2. Objectives

Considering the important role of optimism in realizing organizational goals, the necessity of recognizing the characteristics and the factors affecting it is evident more than ever. The present study was conducted with two main objectives: a) explaining the concept of optimism; b) explaining the mediating role of psychological climate in the relationship between psychological capital and women's organizational optimism. According to theoretical foundations, the basic research questions were:

1. Does psychological capital directly effect on women's organizational optimism?
2. Does psychological capital directly effect the psychological climate?
3. Does psychological climate directly effect women's organizational optimism?
4. Does psychological climate mediate the relationship between psychological capital and psychological climate?

## 3. Methods

The present study was an applied one in terms of objective and used the descriptive - survey method for collecting data; it was quantitative in terms of the type of data collected. For the purpose of this study, all female staff, who worked at Farhangian University (N = 50) were requested to participate. They received a letter from the researchers containing a description of the study aims. The study sampled 45 female staff and faculty members, who worked at Farhangian University in South Khorasan province. The main functions of the professionals, who participated in the study were direct assistance and educational care of the Farhangian university and engagement in educational activities. They were also informed that the research was neither directed nor driven by the university, in which they worked and that their responses would be treated in the strictest confidence. All participants were confidential and volunteers, and 90% completed the questionnaires. Data

were collected through the psychological capital questionnaire (Luthans et al.) (2), Psychological climate questionnaire developed by Koys and DeCotiis (20), and organizational optimism questionnaire developed by Smith et al. (21). These questionnaires were a Likert - type scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) to assess each item. The reliability of the questionnaires and the reliability of measuring instruments was confirmed based on Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability as well as convergent and divergent methods, the results of which are presented in Tables 1 and 2. The hypothesized model was tested using the Smart PLS2 software.

The information in Table 1 indicates that the Cronbach's alpha value and the composite reliability coefficient of all variables were greater than 0.7, showing very good reliability of the measuring instruments. In addition, the reliability was calculated by measuring the factor loads of the constructs and the correlation between the indices of the construct with its related ones and all values were reported as greater than 0.4, indicating that the reliability of all measuring instruments was acceptable. The validity of the questionnaires was assessed by two convergent and divergent criteria for structural equation modeling. For this purpose, the Average Extended Variance (AVE) criterion was used to evaluate the convergent validity of the reported results in Table 2.

According to Table 2, since the criterion value for the acceptance level of AVE was 0.5 (Holland, 1999), the convergent validity of the questionnaires was acceptable. The divergent validity of the questionnaires was also calculated using the Fornell and Larcker method and the difference between the indices of the construct with others was calculated by comparing average variance extended (AVE) square root of each construct with the coefficients correlation values between the constructs, the results of which have been reported in Table 2. The results indicate that the values of the main matrix diameter were greater than the lower and upper values of the main diameter, indicating the appropriateness of the divergent validity. The statistical population of this research included all female employees working at Farhangian University in South Khorasan Province (Imam Sajjad Campus, Shahid Bahonar Campus and Bentolhoda Sadr Center) (N = 50). Due to the limited statistical population, the entire statistical population was selected as the statistical sample of the study based on the census method and ultimately, data from 45 questionnaires was analyzed. Regarding the small sample size, data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling Modeling (SEM) and the Smart PLS2 software. In addition, in order to ensure fitting of the structural model and the overall model presented in the PLS software, other indicators were considered, which are reported in the following table.

**Table 1.** Reliability Criteria of the Research Variables

| First level variables           | AVE  | Composite Reliability | R Square | Cronbachs Alpha |
|---------------------------------|------|-----------------------|----------|-----------------|
| Psychological capital           | 0.70 | 0.98                  | 0.72     | 0.98            |
| Psychological climate           | 0.78 | 0.97                  | 0.39     | 0.96            |
| Women's organizational optimism | 0.51 | 0.94                  |          | 0.93            |

**Table 2.** Divergent Validity of the Research Variables

| Variables             | Psychological Climate | Women's Organizational Optimism | Psychological Capital |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Psychological climate | 0.83                  |                                 |                       |
| Women's optimism      | 0.20                  | 0.88                            |                       |
| Psychological capital | 0.64                  | 0.48                            | 0.71                  |

**Table 3.** Fitting Indices of the Structural Model and General Model Fitting

| Variable              | R <sup>2</sup> | SSO    | CV.R | CV.C | GOF   |
|-----------------------|----------------|--------|------|------|-------|
| Psychological climate | 0.71           | 855.00 | 0.46 | 0.67 | 0.603 |
| Women's optimism      | 0.38           | 405.00 | 0.27 | 0.77 |       |

According to [Table 3](#), since SSO and SSE were positive and the values of R square and GOF were greater than 0.33 and 0.36, respectively, it could be said that the desired structural model had proper quality and the overall model fit was confirmed.

#### 4. Results

The results of descriptive statistics found that the women's organizational optimism had a mean value of  $3.46 \pm 0.75$ . Also, on average, were  $35 \pm 0.43$  years old, had  $25 \pm 0.38$ . The Smart PLS2 software output has been presented in [Figure 1](#) and [Table 4](#). [Figure 1](#) (psy.ca) refers to the psychological capital variable; (psy.cl) indicates the psychological climate and (o.optimism) shows the women's organizational optimism variable.

[Figure 1](#) represents the causal relationship between the psychological capital, psychological climate, and women's organizational optimism, the results of which are presented in the form of a structural model in [Table 4](#).

According to the information in [Figure 1](#), there was a significant and direct relationship between psychological capital and female's organizational optimism on the one hand and psychological climate with women's organizational optimism on the other hand; that is, psychological capital had a positive and significant impact on female's organizational optimism both directly and indirectly; according to the output value of the PLS software, 55% of women's organizational optimism changes was directly predicted by the psychological capital and an

approximately 61% ( $84\% \times 73\%$ ) was indirectly explained through the mediating variable of psychological climate. Chin (1998) introduced three amounts of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 as the basis for the values of flow, medium, and strong R<sup>2</sup> (22). Therefore, the reported R<sup>2</sup> value in this study was 0.71 and 0.38, indicating a strong and medium relationship between the research constructs. Moreover, investigating the causative path coefficients for the construct part of the model showed that the relationships between the research constructs were significant and the research questions were confirmed; this was shown by the reported Z values at the level of 0.05, and since the value of the Z statistic was greater than 1.96, psychological capitals and psychological climate have a positive and significant effect on the explanation and prediction of female's organizational optimism in female employees. Furthermore, according to Cohen's d effect size of 0.20 for psychological capital and 0.27 for psychological climate, it can be said that psychological capital and psychological climate had average effect on women's organizational optimism. Also, variance accounted for (VAF) was used to determine the intensity of the indirect effect through the mediator variable (psychological capital) and its value was 0.53. Thus, it could be suggested that more than half of the total effect of the psychological capital is indirectly explained by the mediator variable of the psychological climate.

#### 5. Discussion

Although there are a few studies about female's optimism, all research confirm its positive effects, and acknowledge that female's optimism is regarded as a powerful indicator for predicting organizational performance (10). Findings of the research indicate that fitting indices were in a desirable status for confirmatory factor analysis models for all the latent variables. The results of testing the questions showed that psychological capital had a

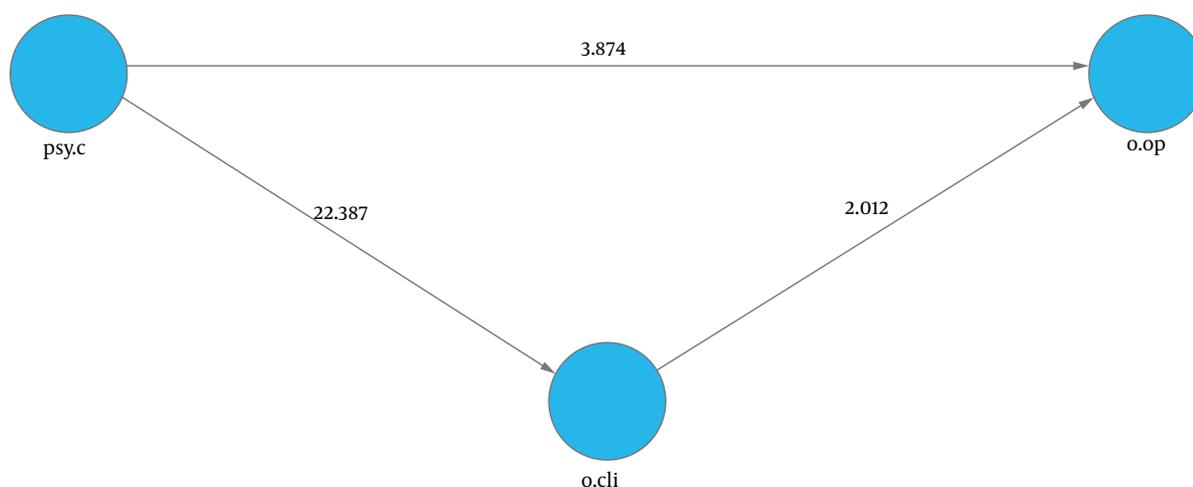


Figure 1. Structural Equation Modeling Modeling in the PLS Software Output

Table 4. Test Results of Research Questions

| Question  | Standard Coefficients | Z Value | Result    |
|---|-----------------------|---------|-----------|
| H <sub>1</sub> : Psychological Capital → Women's organizational optimism          | 0.55                  | 3.87    | Confirmed |
| H <sub>2</sub> : Psychological Capital → Psychological Climate                    | 0.84                  | 22.38   | Confirmed |
| H <sub>3</sub> : Psychological climate → Women's organizational optimism          | 0.73                  | 2.01    | Confirmed |
| H <sub>4</sub> : Psychological Capital → Psychological Climate → Women's optimism | 0.52                  | 3.02    | Confirmed |

positive, direct, and significant effect on female's organizational optimism, both directly and indirectly. In other words, increasing the amount of psychological capital among female employees in Farhangian University creates an optimistic tendency and motivation leading to creation of a more optimistic tendency within the university (the first question). The review of literature of the research indicates that previous studies, which were based on experimental data had not tested the effects of psychological capital on female's organizational optimism; hence the results can not be directly compared with other studies. So far, no research has dealt with the effects of psychological capital on women's organizational optimism; however, in some studies, the role and effect of optimism on other organizational variables, such as physical and mental health, depression, emotional disorders, interpersonal interactions, social functioning, occupational planning levels, inquiry and research, occupational and individual goals, individual returns, individual and organizational performance, and resilience has been studied and the positive relationships among them have been approved. According to this, it can be said that the results of this research are indirectly consistent with studies by Bommer, Rich and Rubins (15), and Tamer (2015). The results of testing the sec-

ond question showed that psychological capital has a positive, direct, and significant effect on psychological climate. The results and findings of this question confirm the findings of Rego and Cunha (2007). The results of testing the third question indicate that psychological climate had a positive, direct, and significant effect on female's organizational optimism. Results of this research are indirectly consistent with the study of Hobfoll (1999). Also, the results of testing question four showed that psychological climate, as a mediator variable, is partly effective on the relationship between psychological capital and psychological climate. Therefore, conservation of resources (COR).

Like others, this research had several limitations that need to be addressed by future research. Firstly, this study used a relatively small - sized sample (N = 45). The second limitation was the causal direction of relationships between psychological capital, psychological climate, and women's optimism, given the use of a time lagged design. To make the direction of relationships between these variables clearer, experimental studies would be necessary. Thirdly, the different components of psychological capital could be related to different outcomes. Not all aspects of psychological capital have to be equally important for all jobs. Future research, conducted on different groups,

could corroborate the validity of the current results. Future research could consider these suggestions that could help improve our understanding of how psychological climate mediates the relationship between psychological capital and women's organizational optimism.

### 5.1. Conclusions

According to the findings of this research, psychological capital of women employees, as a positive source, leads to a positive cycle of resources and as a result improvement in women's organizational optimism. The results of this research help achieve factors and variables that affect the women's organizational optimism. Furthermore, some recommendations and solutions can be offered to increase the women's organizational optimism of staff and professors, who can ultimately help managers to increase the productivity and quality of working life of women employees.

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