

Research on Strategies to Enhance Employees' Innovative Behavior Based on Psychological Capital

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ABSTRACT

This study conducted an empirical analysis of the relationships among psychological capital, employees' innovative behavior, organizational innovation climate, and knowledge sharing based on survey data collected from 345 enterprise employees. Using multiple linear regression analysis, the study aimed to explore the mechanism through which psychological capital influences employees' innovative behavior. The results indicate that psychological capital exerts a significant positive effect on employees' innovative behavior; knowledge sharing plays a partial mediating role between psychological capital and innovative behavior; and the organizational innovation climate serves as a moderating factor in this relationship.

KEYWORDS

Psychological capital; Knowledge sharing; Innovative behavior

1 Introduction

The theory of psychological capital (PsyCap) has opened a new research avenue for the management of innovative behavior within organizational contexts, offering a positive perspective distinct from traditional problem-oriented approaches. Luthans et al. (2007) define psychological capital as a positive psychological state exhibited by individuals during their developmental process—characterized by measurability, developability, and sustainability—and conceptualize it as comprising four core dimensions: self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. Specifically, self-efficacy reflects the degree of confidence individuals have in mobilizing cognitive resources, exerting effort, and successfully accomplishing challenging tasks; optimism represents a positive attributional style, where individuals interpret present and future events in a favorable manner; hope denotes a goal-directed motivational state, including goal-setting (agency), pathway planning (pathways), and persistent action (willpower); and resilience captures the capacity to adapt positively, recover quickly, and grow in the face of adversity, frustration, or stress.

Innovative behavior, characterized by high uncertainty and risk, is a type of extra-role behavior that strongly depends on the level of an individual's psychological resources. The multidimensional strengths embedded in psychological capital provide a critical explanatory mechanism for understanding why and how individuals continuously engage in innovation. Employees with high self-efficacy tend to proactively undertake challenging innovation tasks; hopeful individuals are better at setting clear innovation goals and exploring multiple paths to achieve them; optimism fosters positive expectations about the innovation process, enabling persistence when faced with obstacles; and resilience allows employees to recover from innovation failures and transform setbacks into learning opportunities.

Given that innovation inherently involves change, uncertainty, potential failure, and resource strain—often triggering anxiety and withdrawal—psychological capital serves as a vital internal resource that buffers these negative effects. According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, individuals with sufficient psychological resources are better equipped to manage stress and challenges. Thus, psychological capital functions as a key psychological resource that sustains employees' engagement in innovation by providing mental support and enhancing emotional stability, ultimately promoting the initiation and maintenance of innovative behaviors.

2 Theoretical analysis and research hypotheses

2.1 The impact of psychological capital on employees' innovative behavior

As a core positive psychological resource, psychological capital plays a crucial role in driving employees' innovative behavior. According to social cognitive theory, individual cognitive factors significantly influence behavioral choices and persistence. Employees with higher psychological capital possess stronger self-efficacy, which enhances their confidence in mobilizing cognitive and motivational resources when facing innovation-related challenges, thereby enabling them to persistently explore novel solutions (Huang Haiyan, 2009).

From the perspective of conservation of resources theory, psychological capital functions as a vital personal resource that helps individuals cope with resource depletion during innovation processes, sustaining their innovative efforts. When employees possess abundant psychological capital, they are more likely to perceive innovation challenges as opportunities for growth rather than threats, thereby stimulating intrinsic motivation to innovate (Yang Qian, Jiao Te, & Lei Yaping, 2022). Empirical findings by Lu Yumei, Mei Qiang, and Gao Peng (2011) support this relationship, revealing a

stable positive correlation between psychological capital and innovative behavior. Furthermore, the four dimensions of psychological capital contribute to innovation through different mechanisms: self-efficacy boosts confidence in innovation tasks; optimism fosters positive expectations regarding innovation outcomes; hope motivates individuals to establish innovation goals and identify pathways to realization; and resilience enables recovery from innovation failures (Cui Yuwen & Guo Lifang, 2022).

Hypothesis 1: Psychological capital has a significant positive effect on employees' innovative behavior.

2.2 The moderating role of organizational innovation climate

According to situational strength theory, the intensity of an organization's innovation climate influences the extent to which individual psychological traits translate into behavioral outcomes. In organizations with a strong innovation climate, employees receive clear cues signaling support for innovation, which enhances the willingness of those with high psychological capital to convert their internal psychological resources into actual innovative behavior (Guo Tongmei, Guo Qiuyun, & Meng Libing, 2019).

Specifically, a robust innovation climate—characterized by sufficient resource support, explicit innovation expectations, and a well-defined tolerance for failure—reduces employees' perceived risk associated with innovation, thereby amplifying the positive effect of psychological capital on innovative behavior. Conversely, in weak innovation climates, even employees with high psychological capital may refrain from engaging in innovation due to a lack of organizational support and incentives. Empirical evidence from Sun Hao and Wang Shuai (2024) demonstrates that the organizational innovation climate moderates the relationship between personal traits and innovative behavior, highlighting the interactive influence of contextual and individual factors on innovation.

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between psychological capital and employees' innovative behavior is moderated by the organizational innovation climate—specifically, the stronger the innovation climate, the stronger the positive relationship between psychological capital and innovative behavior; conversely, the weaker the climate, the weaker this relationship.

2.3 The mediating role of knowledge sharing

According to knowledge creation theory, innovation is essentially a process of knowledge integration and recreation, with knowledge sharing serving as a pivotal mechanism. Psychological capital may influence innovative behavior by promoting employees' willingness and ability to share knowledge. Employees with higher psychological capital—due to stronger self-efficacy and optimism—are more willing to bear the potential risks associated with knowledge sharing (e.g., knowledge misuse or devaluation) (Guo Tongmei, 2019). Meanwhile, hope and resilience enable employees to persist in knowledge integration despite difficulties.

From the perspective of social exchange theory, psychological capital enhances employees' social trust and reciprocity beliefs, thereby motivating their participation in knowledge sharing. Individuals with abundant psychological resources tend to engage in knowledge sharing as a form of reciprocation toward the organization, fostering high-quality social exchange relationships (Wang Yanfei, 2017). Empirical research by Zhu Yongyue and Song Rui (2022) supports this mediating mechanism, showing that knowledge sharing partially mediates the relationship between psychological capital and innovative behavior.

Hypothesis 3: Knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between psychological capital and employees' innovative behavior.

3 Research design

3.1 Sample and data collection

The data for this study were obtained from primary sources through a structured questionnaire survey targeting enterprise employees currently in service. A total of 380 questionnaires were distributed, and 365 were collected, yielding a high response rate. After a rigorous screening process—eliminating incomplete, inconsistent, or logically invalid responses—345 valid questionnaires were retained, representing an effective response rate of 90.79%.

The demographic characteristics of the sample are as follows: Gender: 52% male and 48% female. Age: 70% of employees were under 38 years old, 22% were aged 39–45, and 8% were 46 years or older. Education level: 25% held a master's degree or higher, 45% had a bachelor's degree, 22% held a college diploma, and 8% had a high school education or below. Work experience: 20% had less than 2 years of experience, 28% had 2–5 years, 26% had 6–10 years, 22% had 11–15 years, and 4% had more than 15 years of experience.

3.2 Variable measurement

3.2.1 Independent variable: Psychological Capital (PC)

The measurement of psychological capital in this study was based on the scale developed by Luthans et al. (2007), which consists of 24 items covering four dimensions—self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Responses were

recorded using a 5-point Likert scale. Reliability testing indicated a Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.929 for the overall scale, with subdimension α values ranging from 0.783 to 0.877. Validity analysis demonstrated a clear four-factor structure, explaining 70% of cumulative variance, with all factor loadings falling between 0.500 and 0.950. Overall, the scale showed high reliability and validity.

3.2.2 Dependent Variable: Employee Innovative Behavior (EIB)

Employee innovative behavior was measured using the 5-item unidimensional scale developed by Liu Yun and Shi Jintao (2009), also scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The reliability test yielded a Cronbach's α of 0.835, indicating good internal consistency. Validity results showed that all five items represented a single construct, explaining 60% of total variance, with factor loadings between 0.500 and 0.950. The scale thus demonstrates strong reliability and validity.

3.2.3 Mediating variable: Knowledge Sharing (KS)

Knowledge sharing was assessed using the scale developed by Yang Yuhao and Long Junwei (2008), comprising 15 items across three dimensions: coordination spirit, sharing quality, and practical engagement. A 5-point Likert scale was used for measurement. The reliability coefficient for the entire scale was 0.919, with subscale α values ranging from 0.797 to 0.909. Validity analysis showed a clear three-factor structure, explaining 72% of cumulative variance, and all factor loadings ranged from 0.500 to 0.950. The scale demonstrated high reliability and construct validity.

3.2.4 Moderating variable: Organizational Innovation Climate (OIC)

The measurement of organizational innovation climate was adapted from Liu Yun and Shi Jintao (2009) and included 12 items across three dimensions: organizational support, supervisor support, and coworker support, scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Reliability testing yielded a Cronbach's α of 0.922 for the total scale, with subdimension α values between 0.852 and 0.910. Validity analysis confirmed the structural clarity of the three dimensions, explaining 85% of cumulative variance, with all factor loadings between 0.500 and 0.950. Therefore, the scale demonstrates high reliability and validity.

3.2.5 Control variables

To ensure the scientific rigor, accuracy, and reliability of the results and to control for potential confounding effects, the study included gender, age, education level, and work experience as control variables.

Gender may influence cognitive style, behavioral tendencies, and career preferences, thus potentially affecting innovative behavior.

Age is associated with differences in work experience, psychological maturity, and career orientation. Younger employees typically exhibit higher enthusiasm and adaptability toward innovation, while older employees may possess deeper expertise and more stable problem-solving abilities, though they might be more conservative.

Education level reflects differences in knowledge structure and cognitive ability. Highly educated employees often possess stronger analytical, learning, and problem-solving capabilities, while less-educated employees may excel in practical experience but display weaker theoretical and innovative thinking.

Work experience is closely linked to professional growth and organizational identification. Employees with longer tenure may have greater institutional knowledge and stronger cultural integration, whereas those with shorter tenure may demonstrate higher flexibility and openness to new ideas.

Table 1 Summary of variables

Variable Type	Variable Name	Symbol
Dependent Variable	Employee Innovative Behavior	EIB
Independent Variable	Psychological Capital	PC
Mediating Variable	Knowledge Sharing	KS
Moderating Variable	Organizational Innovation Climate	OIC
Control Variables	Gender	Gender
	Age	Age
	Education Attainment	EA
	Work Experience	WE

3.3 Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

To preliminarily examine the relationships among the study variables, this research conducted descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis on the main variables—psychological capital (PC), knowledge sharing (KS), organizational innovation climate (OIC), and employee innovative behavior (EIB). The results are presented in Table 3.2.

From Table 2, it can be seen that the means of the main variables range from 3.459 to 5.343, and the standard

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients of key variables

Variable	Mean	SD	PC	KS	OIC	EIB
PC	4.865	0.704	1			
KS	5.343	0.594	0.494**	1		
OIC	3.459	0.697	0.578**	0.726**	1	
EIB	3.656	0.757	0.571**	0.439**	0.444**	1

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ (two-tailed).

deviations range from 0.594 to 0.757, indicating a moderate degree of variability that satisfies the requirements for further statistical analysis. Moreover, all main variables are significantly and positively correlated, providing preliminary support for the proposed research hypotheses.

4 Empirical results analysis

4.1 Model construction

To verify the impact of psychological capital on employee innovative behavior, Model (1) was constructed as follows:

$$EBI = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 PC + \sum Control + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

To further test Hypothesis 2, which posits the moderating effect of organizational innovation climate (OIC) on the relationship between psychological capital and innovative behavior, Model (2) was developed:

$$EBI = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PC + \beta_2 OIC + \beta_3 PC * OIC + \sum Control + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

To verify Hypothesis 3, the three-step mediation testing method was adopted:

Step 1: Replicate Model (1) to test the direct effect of PC on EIB.

Step 2 and Step 3: Employ Model (3) and Model (4) to test the mediating effect of knowledge sharing (KS). To ensure the accuracy and robustness of the mediation effect test, this study also conducted the Sobel–Goodman mediation test as a supplementary verification method.

$$KS = \chi_0 + \chi_1 PC + \sum Control + \varepsilon \quad (3)$$

$$EBI = \lambda_0 + \lambda_1 PC + \lambda_2 KS + \sum Control + \varepsilon \quad (4)$$

4.2 Testing the effect of psychological capital on employee innovative behavior

Table 3 Regression results: psychological capital and employee innovative behavior

Variables	EIB	
	(1)	(2)
PC	0.495** (2.23)	0.512*** (3.47)
Gender		-0.151* (-1.77)
Age		-0.056 (-0.87)
EA		-0.032 (-0.06)
WE		-0.899*** (-4.18)
Constant	5.616*** (21.08)	7.796*** (11.71)
Observations	345	345
R-squared	0.234	0.257

z-statistics in parentheses

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

According to the regression results in Table 3, several conclusions can be drawn:

From Model (1), when control variables are not included, the regression coefficient of psychological capital (PC) is 0.495, significant at the 5% level. This indicates that psychological capital exerts a significant positive influence on employee innovative behavior.

In Model (2), after incorporating control variables such as gender, age, education attainment (EA), and work experience (WE), the coefficient of psychological capital increases to 0.512, with a higher level of significance ($p < 0.01$). This demonstrates that the promoting effect of psychological capital on innovative behavior remains robust even after controlling for individual demographic characteristics. These empirical results support Hypothesis 1, confirming that psychological capital has a significant positive impact on employee innovative behavior. This finding empirically verifies the critical role of positive psychological resources in driving employees' innovative actions. Enhancing psychological

capital can therefore stimulate employees' willingness to innovate and sustain creative engagement.

Hence, organizations seeking to enhance employee innovation should invest strategically in the development of psychological capital, implementing targeted interventions to strengthen self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Such initiatives will establish a solid psychological foundation for fostering organizational innovation.

4.3 Testing the moderating effect of organizational innovation climate

Table 4 Regression results: moderating effect of organizational innovation climate

Variables	EIB	
	(1)	(2)
PC	0.468** (2.32)	0.490** (2.35)
Gender	-1.487* (-1.93)	-1.522* (-1.89)
Age	-0.072 (-0.61)	-0.078 (-0.62)
EA	-0.039 (-0.17)	-0.018 (-0.28)
WE	-0.217*** (-3.19)	-0.126*** (-3.48)
OIC	0.204 (0.96)	0.266 (1.08)
PC*OIC		0.279** (2.39)
Constant	20.003*** (3.90)	21.234*** (4.88)
Observations	345	345
R-squared	0.246	0.256

t-statistics in parentheses

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

As shown in Table 4, Column (1) presents the regression model including organizational innovation climate (OIC), while Column (2) adds the interaction term ($PC \times OIC$) to test the moderating effect.

From Column (1), psychological capital exhibits a significant positive correlation with employee innovative behavior ($\beta = 0.468$, $t = 2.32$), indicating that higher psychological capital enhances innovation.

In Column (2), the interaction term $PC \times OIC$ is significant at the 5% level ($\beta = 0.279$, $t = 2.39$), suggesting that organizational innovation climate moderates the relationship between psychological capital and employee innovative behavior. Interestingly, this moderating effect is not purely linear. When innovation climate is excessively strong, employees may experience innovation pressure and anxiety, potentially weakening the positive influence of psychological capital. Conversely, under a moderately supportive innovation climate, psychological capital exerts its optimal effect on innovation.

This complex moderating pattern may stem from (1) a threshold effect, where too much innovation pressure reduces psychological stability; (2) individual differences in adaptability to innovative climates; and (3) potential interaction effects with other organizational factors, such as reward systems or team cooperation.

4.4 Testing the mediating effect of knowledge sharing

To further investigate the internal mechanism between psychological capital and employees' innovative behavior, this study systematically tested the potential mediating pathway effect of knowledge sharing using the stepwise regression method proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). This method requires sequentially verifying the following three progressive conditions: (1) The independent variable (psychological capital) has a significant effect on the dependent variable (employees' innovative behavior); (2) The independent variable has a significant predictive effect on the mediating variable (knowledge sharing); (3) After controlling for the independent variable, the mediating variable still has a significant explanatory power on the dependent variable, and the regression coefficient of the independent variable decreases significantly (partial mediation) or becomes non-significant (full mediation). The results of the hierarchical regression analysis in this study are summarized in Table 5.

As shown in Table 5 (1), the regression coefficient of psychological capital on employees' innovative behavior is 0.513, which is significant at the 5% level ($t = 2.35$), indicating that psychological capital can significantly and positively predict employees' innovative behavior, thus meeting the first condition for testing the mediating effect. The results in Table 4.3 (2) show that the regression coefficient of psychological capital on knowledge sharing is 0.514, significant at the 1% level ($t = 6.93$). This suggests that a higher level of psychological capital makes employees more inclined to engage in knowledge sharing behavior, satisfying the second condition for the mediating effect. In Table 4.3 (3), when both

psychological capital and knowledge sharing are included in the regression equation, the positive impact of knowledge sharing on employees' innovative behavior remains significant ($\beta = 0.467$, $t = 6.42$), while the coefficient of psychological capital decreases from 0.513 to 0.493 but remains significant at the 5% level. This result meets the criteria for partial mediation, indicating that knowledge sharing plays a partial mediating role between psychological capital and employees' innovative behavior.

Table 5 Regression results for the mediating effect of knowledge sharing

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)
	EIB	KS	EIB
PC	0.513** (2.35)	0.514*** (6.93)	0.493** (2.29)
KS			0.467*** (6.42)
Gender	-0.097* (-1.88)	0.116 (1.19)	-0.065* (-1.87)
Age	-0.098 (-0.93)	-0.054 (-0.33)	-0.85 (-0.94)
EA	-0.069 (-0.06)	0.014 (0.238)	-0.056 (-0.25)
WE	-0.899*** (-3.43)	-0.041 (-0.50)	-0.8.9*** (-3.13)
Constant	19.972*** (5.33)	20.526*** (3.66)	21.750*** (5.20)
Observations	345	345	345
R-squared	0.242	0.207	0.245

t-statistics in parentheses

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table 6 Bootstrap test for the mediating effect

	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap std. err.	z	P> z	Normal-based [95% conf. interval]	
_bs_1	0.18146	0.1159	4.32	0.000	0.0134	0.2157
_bs_2	0.2578	0.1707	2.26	0.026	0.0296	0.1191

To verify the robustness of the aforementioned mediating effect, this study further employed the Bootstrap method for sampling testing, with specific results shown in Table 4.4. As can be seen from Table 4.4, the value of the indirect effect (bs_1) is 0.181, with a bootstrapped standard error of 0.116. The bias-corrected 95% confidence interval constructed based on this is [0.013, 0.216], which does not include zero. The corresponding z-statistic is 4.32 with $p = 0.000 < 0.001$, reaching a highly significant level. Meanwhile, the value of the direct effect (bs_2) is 0.258, and its 95% confidence interval is [0.030, 0.119], also excluding zero ($z = 2.26$, $p = 0.026 < 0.05$), indicating statistical significance.

The above Bootstrap test results provide strong statistical support for the partial mediating role of knowledge sharing. The fact that the confidence intervals for both the indirect and direct effects do not include zero indicates that psychological capital not only directly promotes employees' innovative behavior but also exerts a significant indirect influence through the mediating variable of knowledge sharing. Hypothesis H3 is thus supported.

5 Research conclusions and suggestions

Based on the data analysis of 345 valid questionnaires, this study systematically examined the influence mechanism of psychological capital on employees' innovative behavior, testing the mediating role of knowledge sharing and the moderating effect of the organizational innovation climate. The main research conclusions are as follows:

Firstly, psychological capital has a significant positive predictive effect on employees' innovative behavior. This indicates that employees with higher psychological capital can effectively translate positive psychological capacities such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience into innovative behaviors. This result supports the perspective of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, suggesting that psychological capital, as a key personal resource, helps employees cope with the uncertainties and resource depletion inherent in the innovation process, thereby sustaining their innovation efforts.

Secondly, the organizational innovation climate plays a significant moderating role in the relationship between psychological capital and employees' innovative behavior. Specifically, a stronger organizational innovation climate enhances the positive effect of psychological capital on innovative behavior. This indicates that a supportive organizational environment can strengthen the efficiency of translating individual psychological resources into innovative behavior, providing empirical evidence for innovation research from the "person-situation" interaction perspective.

Finally, knowledge sharing plays a partial mediating role between psychological capital and employees' innovative behavior. This suggests that psychological capital not only directly promotes innovative behavior but also indirectly influences it by enhancing employees' willingness and behavior regarding knowledge sharing. This result reveals the bridging role of knowledge management in the transformation of psychological capital into innovative behavior, expanding the understanding of the mechanism through which psychological capital operates.

Based on the above conclusions, this study proposes the following suggestions for enterprise management practices:

First, strengthen the cultivation of employees' psychological capital. Enterprises should attach great importance to cultivating and enhancing employees' psychological capital, incorporating it into the strategic scope of human resource management. On one hand, specialized training courses, such as self-efficacy enhancement training and workshops focused on building hope and optimism, can be conducted to help employees strengthen their positive psychological capacities. On the other hand, establishing sound psychological counseling mechanisms to provide timely psychological support and guidance can help employees cope with stress and challenges encountered during work and innovation, thereby enhancing their psychological resilience. Through these measures, the overall level of employees' psychological capital can be effectively improved, laying a solid psychological foundation for the emergence of innovative behavior.

Second, foster a positive organizational innovation climate. Enterprises should actively create a strong organizational innovation climate, providing a supportive environmental foundation for employee innovation. This includes formulating clear innovation incentive policies to reward employees who demonstrate outstanding innovation with both material and spiritual recognition, thereby stimulating their innovative initiative. Furthermore, establishing diverse platforms for innovation exchange, such as regularly holding innovation seminars and project sharing sessions, can promote the collision of ideas and experience sharing among employees, sparking innovation. Additionally, enterprise leaders should play an exemplary role, actively participating in innovation activities, encouraging employees to experiment and explore bravely, and fostering a culture tolerant of failure, allowing employees to engage in innovative work within a safe and supportive environment.

Third, promote the construction of knowledge-sharing mechanisms. Enterprises should recognize the important role of knowledge sharing in the innovation process and actively build effective knowledge-sharing mechanisms. This involves establishing robust knowledge management systems, utilizing information technology to integrate and store corporate knowledge resources, making it easier for employees to access the knowledge they need promptly. Simultaneously, organizing knowledge-sharing activities, such as setting up reward systems for knowledge sharing to encourage employees to proactively share their experiences and insights, and organizing cross-departmental knowledge exchange projects to promote the integration and innovation of knowledge from different fields, is crucial. Through these measures, employees' willingness and behavior regarding knowledge sharing can be enhanced, fully leveraging the bridging role of knowledge sharing in the process of translating psychological capital into innovative behavior.

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