

## A Study on the Effects of Identity Conflicts on Organizational Behaviour: Inquiry in the Field of Education in Contemporary Assam

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**Abstract:** Assam has been the historic “melting pot” of diverse ethnic identities. However this “melting pot” is now considered to have become an “ethnic cauldron”. Assam has witnessed numerous conflicts in the recent times. These conflicts have demonstrated themselves in many ways. They were sometimes demands for recognition of a particular language as the official language, at times upsurges for separate state, sometimes stir for greater share in development and in the most extreme cases were secessionist demands. The phenomenon started immediately after Independence with Naga insurgency demanding secession from India. This was intensified in the 1980s as demand for secession or separate homeland spread to various groups in the region. It started with the ULFA, then the Bodoland movement. Then the Karbis of the Karbi Anglong district launched a movement for autonomous state. In return, the demand for “ethnic” homeland was adopted by various other groups of the state such as the Mising, the Tiwas, and the Rabhas etc. Each of these groups today has its own autonomous district council with varying powers, with or without well-defined territorial boundaries. The process has not attained a closure yet. Since many years the Koch-Rajbanshis have been agitating for a separate Kamatapur state incorporating 11 districts in the Brahmaputra valley and 6 districts in North Bengal region. The Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (IM) contention for ‘Nagalim’ (Naga homeland) incorporates a large tract of land which is habitat of several tribes of Assam like the Karbis, Dimasa-Kacharis etc. Together with these, there is the looming immigrant’s issue that has been propelling immense tension in the social and political context of Assam.

**Keywords:** Assam, Organizational Behaviour, Education, melting pot, official language, Naga insurgency.

### INTRODUCTION

Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) is defined by Luthans [2] as “the study and application of positively-oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace”. Luthans and Youssef define Self-efficacy, Hope, Optimism, and Resiliency as four key psychological resource capacities that best meet the inclusion criteria for POB, which enhances managing effectiveness and organizational performance. Assam is an optimum region to understand the Organization Behaviour of individuals thriving in prolonged identity based conflicts. The field of education is sensitive area in terms of its vulnerability to be effected by identity politics. Guwahati has recently seen the boom of technical colleges with a good number of students opting for vocational courses in the undergraduate level. This paper focuses on the Organizational Behaviour of the college teachers in Guwahati, and examines if they have been able to pass on the positive outcomes to their

students through their performance or effectiveness as teachers. This paper will attempt to highlight the effectiveness of college teachers as an outcome of their psychological capacities which in turn impact the effectiveness of academic institutes in conflict torn areas.

Following the lead of positive psychology, as in, “what is good about life is as genuine as what is bad and therefore deserves equal attention” [1], is the recently emerging field of Positive Organizational Behavior, or simply POB. Just as positive psychology does not claim to have discovered the importance of positivity to people; POB also recognizes that over the years there have been many positive constructs in organizational research such as positive affectivity, positive reinforcement, procedural justice, job satisfaction and commitment, prosocial and organizational citizenship behavior. Instead, positive psychology, and now its application to the workplace as POB, simply attempts to give a renewed emphasis to the importance of a positive approach.

The field of positive psychology introduced by Martin Seligman deals with concepts such as happiness, satisfaction and hope. However, in contemporary business science research, there appears to be a distinct gap in our current understanding of the behaviour of the total person, specifically within an organisational context. Seligman [2] challenges the orthodox and somewhat myopic view of psychological research by describing how a deeper understanding of what is “good” can enhance current theory building. The standard approach being adopted by OB practitioners today, appears prescriptive by nature when studies into constructs such as organisational trauma, leader dysfunction and workplace grief is the norm [3]. By proposing that strength can be built from the positive aspects of psychology, an alternate view may be provided to guide sustainable solutions for businesses [2]. Positivity enables one to transcend from ‘repairing’ something which is broken to nurturing something which is still going strong. Whereas traditional approaches are highly prescriptive, in other words, relying on remedies to fix symptomatic issues [4]. This may be the reason why Seligman [2], Snyder, Ilardi, Michael and Cheavens [5] have focused on to the idea that psychology should not be fixated on the study of disease, weakness and damage; rather it should refocus its energies on the study of strength and virtues. Similarly, OB studies should move away from analysing why organisations are weak and damaged to what makes them strong and functional in times of crisis [6].

The term positivity can be both objectively and subjectively studied. The definition of POB is not crystal clear, as in whether it is a construct, a phenomenon or a medium to view a phenomenon. Luthans [6] extrapolates the philosophy of positive psychology [2] to that of positive organisational behaviour, which can be noted in his subsequent definition of the concept.

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Drawn from positive psychology and OB, psychological capital or PsyCap is defined as “an individual's positive psychological state of development and is characterized by: having confidence (efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding in the future; persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals( hope) in order to succeed and when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success” [7].

Luthans and Youssef define Self-efficacy, Hope, Optimism, and Resiliency as four key psychological resource capacities that best meet the inclusion criteria for POB, which enhances managing effectiveness and organizational performance. Following the above definition, PsyCap theory development indicates that the four dimensions possess a common underlying positive agent capacity, that is , those with high PsyCap tend to be more determined, expend more effort, expect success, maneuver obstacles more effectively, and bounce back from setbacks more readily[8, 7].

Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura is the belief that one has the capabilities to “execute the courses of actions required to manage prospective situations”. It represents the best fit with all the criteria of POB among all the four capacities. Self-efficacy belief appears to determine how much effort people will spend on a task and how long they will persist with it.

Hope is defined by Snyder, Irving, and Anderson as “a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (planning to meet goals).” With the hope to achieve certain goals, employees have an internalized control that creates the determination and motivation (willpower) to accomplish their goals. They would also be able to create and use alternative pathways and contingency plans to achieve their goals and overcome obstacles.

Optimism is defined by positive psychologists as a cognitive characteristic in terms of an expectancy of positive outcome and/or a positive causal attribution. However, Christopher Peterson, the Science Director of the VIA Institute on Character had once noted that managers should keep in mind that “Optimism is not simply cold cognition, and if we forget the emotional flavor that pervades optimism, we can make little sense of the fact that optimism is both motivated and motivating.”

Resiliency is defined by Luthans [2] as “the capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, failure, or even positive events, progress, and increased responsibility.” Unlike traditional conceptualizations of resiliency as an extraordinary capacity that can only be observed and admired in highly unique individuals, the positive psychology perspective in management on resilience is that it is a learnable capacity that can be developed in the most ordinary of people.

Youssef & Luthans [2] tested hypotheses on the impact of selected positive psychological resource capacities of hope, optimism, and resilience have on desired work-related employee outcomes. These outcomes included performance, job satisfaction, work happiness, and organizational commitment. The

findings generally supported that employees' positive psychological resource capacities relate to, and contribute unique variance to, the outcomes. However, hope, and, to a lesser extent, optimism and resilience, differentially contributed to the various outcomes. Utility analysis supported the practical implications of the study results.

Simmons and Nelson [9] have discovered that during rapid marketplace transition and so-called turbulence, by emphasizing the emotions, attitudes and actions that nurture well-being and positivity in individuals, stakeholder relationships are strengthened. By nurturing and reinforcing the good aspects of a relationship, proactive solutions during problematic periods form part of a sustainable strategy. It can be deduced that organisations which reject the familiar focus on pathology may transcend turbulent times successfully over the long run.

### **Rationale**

Work life is one of the most important dimensions of one's life and getting the right kind of work environment plays a key role in making work life fruitful. In a country like India getting the perfect work atmosphere is somewhat complicated but with the advent of Positive Organizational Behavior, organizations too feel the need to utilize the Psychological Capital of the employees to emphasize on stronger aspects rather than trying to fix whatever is weak. POB suggests that instead of focusing on the weaknesses, the strengths of the employees should be strengthened. Psychological capital (PsyCap) refers to such resources present in each individual, namely hope, resiliency, efficacy and optimism which form the basic core. These qualities are like assets to an individual that would make one survive even at one's worst phases of life's ups and downs. The four dimensions of PsyCap can be said to be more of a state-like, rather than trait-like, which means they can be learned, developed and also trained. This implies that performance can be improved by focusing on self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resiliency and could be more effective than trying to change fundamental personality traits.

Assam has witnessed numerous conflicts in the recent times. These conflicts have demonstrated themselves in many ways. They were sometimes

demands for recognition of a particular language as the official language, at times upsurges for separate state, sometimes stir for greater share in development and in the most extreme cases were secessionist demands. Keeping in view the present scenario this paper includes college teachers as its sample because they are the ones who belong to a sector which is directly impacted whenever any conflicts rise up, be it the bandh culture that is still practiced in Assam or the conduct of the students which is altered because of such incidents. Belonging to the same fraternity I very well understand the psyche of the college teachers and what they have to offer to the affected students, the expectations that is sought from them and also the responsibility of being an ideal person solely rests on them.

Teachers often play multiple roles, informal counseling being one of them. But if they themselves do not practice a positive approach towards life and situation, it would be difficult for them to deliver what is expected out of them. Therefore measuring their psychological capacities forms the base of this paper.

### **Objective**

To study the psychological capacities of the college teachers who belong to riot prone areas and teachers who do not belong to riot prone areas.

### **Hypothesis**

There will be significant difference in the psychological capacities of the college teachers who belong to riot prone areas and teachers who do not belong to riot prone areas.

### **Sample**

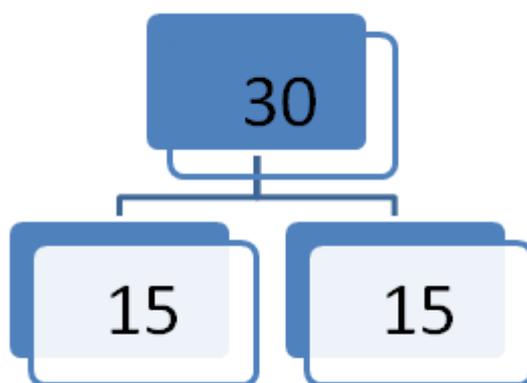
The sample consisted of 30 college teachers from various colleges in Guwahati out of which 15 belong to areas which are riot prone and 15 belong to areas that have not witnessed any ethical riot. The criteria for sample selection were totally based on convenience and nativity to the area that has witnessed ethical riots.

### **Design**

Total size of subjects: 30 college teachers

Belonging to riot hit area: 15

Not belonging to riot hit area: 15



**Statistical technique**

T-test was used to find out the significance of difference of the means between the two groups

**Tool**

Psychological Capital (PsyCap) Questionnaire (PCQ) Fred L. Luthans, Ph.D., Bruce J. Avolio, Ph.D., & James A. Avey, Ph.D. Gallup Leadership Institute Psychological capital (PsyCap) is a positive state-like capacity that has undergone extensive theory-building and research. In the book by Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio on *Psychological Capital* [8], it is defined as “an individual’s positive psychological state of development and is characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back

and even beyond (resilience) to attain success.” Thus, the PsyCap consists of efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience and when combined has been shown to represent a second-order, core factor that predicts performance and satisfaction better than each of the four factors that make it up [10].

The PCQ-24, a measure of PsyCap, has undergone extensive psychometric analyses and support from samples representing service, manufacturing, education, and high-tech, military and cross cultural sectors. Each of the four components in PsyCap is measured by 6 items. The resulting score represents an individual’s level of positive PsyCap.

**RESULTS**

**Table-1: mean values**

Groups	Mean Scores	SD	t-value	Significant difference
Teachers belonging to riot prone area	106.26	9.73	-1.479	.150
Teachers not belonging to riot prone area	112.00	11.43		

The above table shows the mean values of both the groups. The t-value of groups shows that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of both the groups ( t= -1.479,p > .05).

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this paper was to measure the Psycap of two groups of college teachers, teachers belonging to riot prone areas and teachers who do not belong to riot prone areas. The results obtained from both the groups show that there exists no significant difference between the mean scores of both the groups implying that both the groups do not differ significantly in their psychological capacities thereby rejecting the proposed hypothesis that there will be a significant difference between the psychological capacities of both the groups.

The average scores of both the groups were seen to be high which indicates that this lot of college teachers from both the groups has higher than average scores in their measure of PsyCap. It is a good indication that people who have already faced turbulence in their areas or family are still positive about the situation. It is easier to entertain negativity rather than nurturing positivism. This could be interpreted that they possess the qualities of being hopeful, optimistic, confident and definitely resilient in their outlook towards the disturbed scenario of Assam in general. These positive qualities were seen to be reflected in the opinion of the students about their teachers who were informally interviewed about the quality of their teachers.

Amidst such crisis and the situations that keeps recurring in Assam at random intervals, possessing positive attributes is an asset. It becomes highly difficult to maintain such qualities when other factors are constantly at loggerheads with each other. Personal experiences, individual differences, personality type, upbringing, environment, family background and their collective experiences contribute a lot in making one practice and believe in the positive aspects of the negative events.

**Limitations of the study**

Every study suffers from some limitations. Time and resource constraints do not allow one to form an all-inclusive study and this research suffers from the same. The sample size of the study is very small and therefore cannot be generalized. It served as a general trend on the PsyCap of the sample involved.

The results cannot be generalized for all job types and settings. On the basis of quantitative method, one cannot fully grasp the reality so further research in this method requires to be supplemented with some other qualitative methods.

Factors like paucity of time, tendency to give socially desirable responses, length of the questionnaires, personal factors of the subjects may have tinted the results of this study. Moreover this paper is a part of my ongoing research for Ph.D and is work in progress. The perspectives are still open for further substantiation and elaboration.

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**Appendix**

CATEGORY I ( teachers belonging to riot prone areas)	CATEGORY II (teachers not belonging to riot prone areas )
87	117
92	120
101	120
115	111
120	82
106	109
109	120
109	112
105	93
111	108
108	126
120	120
92	120
111	111
108	111

Scores on PCQ; N=30; Category I =15; Category II =15