

Not all psychological capital is equal: a scoping review of psychological capital profiles

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KEYWORDS

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PsyCap
Profiles
Scoping review
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ABSTRACT

Psychological capital (composed of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience) is a malleable, state-like psychological resource, positively linked to well-being, health, and performance across applied domains. Moving beyond traditional variable-centered research, this scoping review maps person-centered empirical studies to identify psychological capital profiles and examine the variables that differentiate them. Following PRISMA-ScR guidelines, 20 studies (21 empirical studies) published between 2019-2026 were reviewed. The results revealed that the number of profiles identified ranges from 2 to 7. Some studies reported profiles that differ only in terms of psychological capital intensity (level-based), while others identified more complex combinations across dimensions (shape-based). Also, profiles were distinguished by significant differences in several variables (e.g., well-being, outcomes, socio-demographic characteristics). These findings support the relevance of a person-centered approach to better understand the multidimensional nature of psychological capital and provide a solid basis for developing tailored interventions to enhance individual well-being and performance.

No todo el capital psicológico es igual: una revisión exploratoria de los perfiles de capital psicológico

PALABRAS CLAVE

Capital psicológico
CapPsy
Perfiles
Revisión exploratoria
Investigación centrada en la persona

RESUMEN

El capital psicológico (compuesto por autoeficacia, esperanza, optimismo y resiliencia) es un recurso psicológico maleable y dinámico, vinculado positivamente con el bienestar, la salud y el desempeño en diversos dominios aplicados. Más allá de la investigación tradicional centrada en las variables, esta revisión exploratoria mapeó estudios empíricos centrados en la persona para identificar perfiles de capital psicológico y examinó las variables que los diferencian. Siguiendo las directrices PRISMA-ScR, se revisaron 20 artículos (21 estudios empíricos) publicados entre 2019 y 2026. Los resultados revelaron que el número de perfiles identificados oscilaba entre 2 y 7. Algunos estudios informaron perfiles que difieren sólo en términos de la intensidad del capital psicológico (basados en el nivel), mientras que otros identificaron combinaciones más complejas entre las dimensiones (basados en la forma). Asimismo, los perfiles se distinguieron por diferencias significativas en diversas variables (ej., bienestar, resultados, características sociodemográficas). Estos hallazgos respaldan la relevancia de un enfoque centrado en la persona para comprender mejor la naturaleza multidimensional del capital psicológico y proporcionan una base sólida para desarrollar intervenciones personalizadas (o adaptadas) que mejoren el bienestar y el desempeño individual.

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Under the framework of Positive Psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), several constructs have been developed to promote individual well-being, such as resilience, character strengths, and psychological capital (PsyCap). Specifically, PsyCap (Luthans et al., 2007) is defined as a positive, dynamic, and multidimensional personal resource composed of four components: self-efficacy (confidence in one's abilities to accomplish tasks), hope (capacity to set goals and find alternative pathways to achieve them), optimism (positive attribution about one's present and future success) and resilience (ability to recover and grow from adversity). Over the past two decades, PsyCap has been widely studied and associated with positive and desirable outcomes such as job satisfaction, psychological well-being, performance, and organizational commitment; and negatively associated with undesirable outcomes such as turnover intentions (Avey et al., 2011; Youssef-Morgan, 2024). In addition, it has been studied in different organizational contexts and sectors, such as healthcare (e.g., Yang et al., 2023) or education (e.g., Ferradás et al., 2019). Importantly, PsyCap is a state-like and malleable psychological resource that changes over time and can be developed and promoted through psychological interventions (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Its malleability is derived from the state-like nature of its four components, each of which responds to experience, social influence, and deliberate practice, unlike stable personality traits (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Terry et al., 2020). These characteristics strengthen the rationale for examining it across occupational, educational, and clinical populations alike.

From the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2002), personal resources (such as PsyCap) do not operate in isolation but tend to co-occur, accumulate, and reinforce one another as resource caravans. Specifically, PsyCap represents a higher-order and synergistic construct in which self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism interact dynamically to support adaptive functioning and performance across contexts (Luthans et al., 2007). Traditionally, PsyCap has been studied using a variable-centered approach, which focuses on the relationships and correlations between its four components, assuming homogeneity across individuals (see recent reviews, Nguyen et al., 2024; Youssef-Morgan, 2024). This approach may overlook meaningful intra-individual differences in how PsyCap resources combine. In this line, recent evidence suggests that the four PsyCap dimensions may not contribute equally to explaining specific outcomes or behaviors (Liu & Huang, 2022; Peñalver et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2019). Consequently, increasing attention has been paid to person-centered approaches, which identify subgroups of individuals with distinct PsyCap configurations (Bouckennooghe et al., 2019; Ferradás et al., 2019). For instance, individuals high in optimism and hope but low in resilience may cope with stress or perform differently compared to those with a more balanced profile (Ramírez-Pérez & Zurita, 2024).

To date, the person-centered literature remains fragmented across different contexts, populations, and methodologies (e.g., latent profile analysis, cluster analysis; Geremias et al., 2022; Song et al., 2024), and no previous review has integrated these findings. Moreover, identifying PsyCap profiles is only the first

step toward understanding their theoretical and practical relevance. The interpretation of these profiles depends on the variables used to characterize and distinguish them, such as well-being, performance, health, sociodemographic characteristics, or contextual factors. Therefore, a comprehensive synthesis of the identified profile solutions and the variables used to interpret them is needed to advance theory, improve comparability across studies, and guide future research.

The present study

The present study conducts a scoping review to systematically map and integrate the fragmented and emerging literature on PsyCap profiles derived from person-centered approaches. Given this high heterogeneity and the emerging nature of the field, a scoping review is the most appropriate design rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis. The lack of methodological and statistical homogeneity precludes statistical pooling; thus, a scoping review allows for a broader mapping and overview of how these diverse profiles have been identified and interpreted (Munn et al., 2018). Accordingly, two guiding research questions were formulated: research question 1: What is the number and configuration of PsyCap profiles identified in the existing literature? and research question 2: What types of variables have been used to compare PsyCap profiles across empirical studies?

Method

This scoping review followed the PRISMA-ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018) to map empirical studies on PsyCap profiles. No pre-registration was completed. The review focused on identifying the number and characteristics of PsyCap profiles, analyzing their consistency across studies and populations, and synthesizing the variables used to differentiate them.

Search strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted up to March 2026 to ensure transparency and reproducibility. No date restrictions were applied, as the topic is relatively new and the aim was to capture all relevant studies. Searches were performed in Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, and PsycINFO, using the Boolean string: (“Psychological capital” OR “PsyCap”) AND (“Latent profile analysis” OR “Profile analysis” OR “Person-centered” approach OR “profile*”). In PubMed, the following string was used: [Title/Abstract] (“psychological capital” OR “PsyCap”) AND [Title/Abstract] (“latent profile analysis” OR “cluster analysis” OR “person-centered” OR “profile*”). In Web of Science: TS=(“psychological capital” OR “PsyCap”) AND TS=(“latent profile analysis” OR “cluster analysis” OR “person-centered” OR “profile*”). In Scopus: TITLE-ABS-KEY(“psychological capital” OR “PsyCap”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(“latent profile analysis” OR “cluster analysis” OR “person-centered” OR “profile*”). Finally, in PsycINFO: (“psychological capital” OR “PsyCap”) AND (“latent

profile analysis” OR “cluster analysis” OR “person-centered” OR “profile*”).

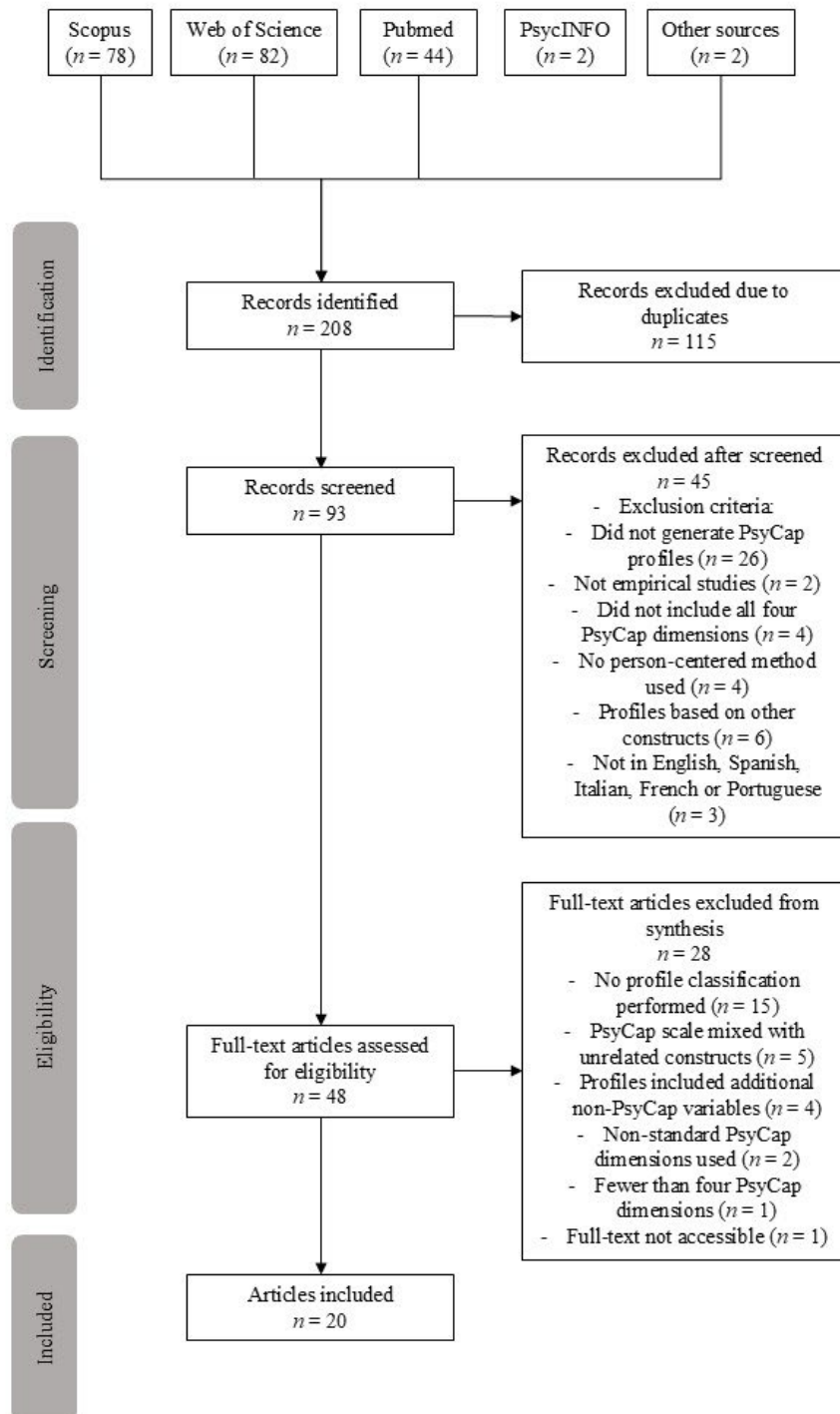
Eligibility criteria

Each study was required to meet the following inclusion criteria: (1) used a validated PsyCap measure covering the four

original dimensions (hope, self-efficacy, resilience, optimism); (2) applied a person-centered method (e.g., latent profile or cluster analysis) to derive distinct profiles; (3) were peer-reviewed empirical articles published in a scientific journal or a peer reviewed book chapter; and (4) were published in English, Spanish, French, Italian, or Portuguese.

Figure 1

PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process



Note. Although 20 articles were included in the review, one article (Bouckennooghe et al., 2019) reported two independent studies with different samples and analyses. Therefore, Table 1 presents 21 studies.

Data extraction, screening, and synthesis

Data extraction and screening followed a structured internal protocol developed before the process began. Although not formally registered in a public database, this form ensured standardized data collection. Figure 1 shows the selection process followed. The initial search yielded 208 records, exported to an Excel spreadsheet for centralized management during the screening and data extraction stages. Duplicate records were identified and removed by one author based on matching criteria, including title, authors, year of publication, and DOI. To enhance accuracy, the deduplication process was subsequently checked by a second author. This resulted in 93 unique entries. All screening, selection and data extraction stages were conducted independently by the three authors, with any disagreements or uncertainties resolved through joint discussion and consensus. Titles and abstracts were screened, excluding 45 articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria. The remaining 48 full texts were assessed in detail, 28 were excluded for reasons such as not reporting PsyCap profiles, using incomplete measures, or applying unrelated constructs. One article could not be retrieved despite repeated attempts to contact the authors. A backward reference search was conducted to enhance the comprehensiveness of the search process and minimize the risk of overlooking relevant studies, identifying two additional articles and yielding a final sample of 20 studies published between 2019 and 2026. Earlier publications did not meet the inclusion criteria, highlighting that the application of person-centered approaches to PsyCap research represents a relatively recent line of inquiry. Finally, data were extracted regarding sample, methodology, number/configuration of profiles, and associated variables. Narrative synthesis was used to identify convergences and divergences across studies.

Following the selection phase, studies were analyzed to provide an overview of PsyCap profiles. Data extraction focused on: (1) the number and configuration of profiles, and (2) the variables used to interpret them, including sociodemographic, psychological, and work-related outcomes, with no restriction on the type of variables reported. Extracted information was reviewed iteratively to ensure accuracy and consistency, and findings were synthesized to capture how PsyCap profiles have been conceptualized and interpreted across studies.

Risk of bias and quality assessment

Methodological quality and risk of bias were assessed using the AXIS tool (Downes et al., 2016) for cross-sectional studies ($n = 18$) and the NIH Quality Assessment Tool for Observational Cohort and Cross-Sectional Studies (NHLBI, 2014) for longitudinal studies ($n = 3$). Assessment was conducted independently by two authors following the standardized criteria of each instrument. Disagreements were resolved by consensus.

For cross-sectional studies, quality was expressed as the percentage of criteria met, (0 = *No/do not know*; 1 = *Yes*). This percentage-based approach allows for a transparent and quantifiable comparison of methodological rigor across studies, cover-

ring aspects such as clarity of objectives, appropriateness of methodology, and reporting of results.

Results

Study characteristics

The summary of empirical studies examining PsyCap profiles is presented in Table 1. From a bibliometric perspective, China emerged as the leading country in this field ($n = 11$). From a methodological perspective, the samples included employees ($n = 11$), students ($n = 6$), and other populations (e.g., patients and citizens; $n = 4$), with sample sizes ranging from 102 to 2,790 participants. Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) was the most widely used technique ($n = 16$), most studies were cross-sectional ($n = 19$), and the majority of studies used the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ; Luthans et al., 2007) or measures derived from it through cultural, contextual, or shortened adaptations ($n = 19$).

These findings raise questions about the relation between sample size, number of participants, number of profiles, and analysis approach. Recommended sample sizes range from 500 participants for LPA (Spurk et al., 2020), 200-500 for LTA (Edelsbrunner et al., 2022), at least 150 for GMM (Martin & Von Oertzen, 2015), and approximately 70 times the number of variables for cluster analysis (Dolnicar et al., 2014); only 13 studies met these criteria. Larger samples generally identified more profiles (e.g., Ferradás et al., 2019), although studies with intermediate sample sizes also reported multiple profiles (e.g., Geremias et al., 2022), suggesting that sample heterogeneity and analytical method may also influence results. Regarding methodology, LPA identified between 2 and 7 profiles, whereas k -means and traditional cluster analyses consistently yielded four. GMM and LTA typically extracted five profiles, possibly reflecting their ability to capture longitudinal or developmental patterns.

Of the total 14 studies were rated as high quality ($\geq 80\%$) and 3 as moderate (60-80%); none fell below 60%. Scores ranged from 75% to 95% ($M = 83.8\%$), indicating strong overall quality. For longitudinal studies, one was rated as good and two as fair; the latter presented limitations including high attrition rates, limited reporting of participation and sample size justification, and insufficient adjustment for confounding variables. Quality assessment was conducted to contextualize findings, not to exclude studies.

RQ1: What is the number and configuration of PsyCap profiles identified in the existing literature?

The reviewed studies revealed considerable variability in the number of PsyCap profiles identified (2-7 profiles). However, the most common solution included 3 profiles ($n = 9$), followed by 4 profiles ($n = 6$). Furthermore, studies conducted with employee samples tended to identify a greater number and diversity of profiles (ranging from 2 to 7), whereas those involving students or other populations (e.g., patients, citizens) con-

sistently reported fewer and more stable numbers of profiles, typically 3 or 4.

Studies identifying 2 or 3 profiles tended to be characterized by level-based differences, conceptualizing PsyCap as a unidimensional construct, in which the four dimensions (self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience) showed homogeneous levels within each profile. These configurations were usually described through intensity gradients (e.g., low, moderate, or high PsyCap), without evidence of differential configurations between the dimensions. This suggests a latent structure based on level-based variations (i.e., intensity), rather than shape-based (i.e., qualitatively distinct) patterns. Such an approach was observed in 10 studies.

In contrast, studies identifying 4-profile solutions began to reveal shape-based differences, exhibiting mixed configurations in which the PsyCap dimensions were no longer fully aligned. For instance, some profiles were characterized by high self-efficacy and hope but low resilience and optimism (i.e., hopeful-efficacy-based), while others displayed high optimism combined with lower levels in the remaining dimensions (optimism-based). In other words, these studies emphasized differentiated patterns across PsyCap dimensions, moving beyond the assumption of a homogeneous, one-dimensional construct. Notably, across the studies identifying 4 profiles, only one shape-based configuration was replicated in more than one investigation: the pattern characterized by high self-efficacy and hope alongside low resilience and optimism (high self-efficacy and hope/low resilience and optimism; Djourova et al., 2019; Gerasimias et al., 2022).

Finally, among studies identifying five or more profiles, the six most frequently reported configurations were examined. The three most common reflected homogeneous PsyCap patterns (i.e., low, moderate, and high PsyCap), whereas the remaining three represented mixed configurations, such as low optimism combined with moderate levels on the other dimensions.

RQ2: What types of variables have been used to compare PsyCap profiles across empirical studies?

All studies examined variables that helped to differentiate and interpret the identified profiles. Based on the variables considered, the results were organized into 5 categories:

Well being. Work engagement has been used in three studies (Bouckennooghe et al., 2019; Gao et al., 2023; Gillet et al., 2024). The results indicate that work engagement has shown significant differences between PsyCap profiles, serving as a key variable for interpreting them. In general, profiles with higher levels of PsyCap show higher levels than the other profiles. Similarly, job satisfaction has been used in three studies (Choisay et al., 2025; Djourova et al., 2019; Song et al., 2024). Profiles with higher levels of PsyCap showed higher levels of job satisfaction. Although affective commitment (Choisay et al., 2025), quality of life (Cui et al., 2025), subjective well-being (Gillet et al., 2024), and health (i.e., self-reported, mental; He et al., 2025; Pradhan & Anand, 2026) were only used in one study each. The results were in line with the previous ones: partici-

pants with a high PsyCap profile showed a higher level of the variable than the other profiles (low, medium, or mixed).

Discomfort. Perceived stress was assessed in three studies (Gillet et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024a; Zhang et al., 2024b), which systematically found that perceived stress is a key variable in distinguishing PsyCap profiles, with profiles with higher levels of PsyCap reporting lower levels of perceived stress. Insomnia was found to be an influential factor for the medium and affluent PsyCap groups, with lower PsyCap profiles reporting higher sleep problems (Choisay et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024b). Burnout was examined in four studies (Cui et al., 2025; Ferradás et al., 2019; Song et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024a), consistently linking higher PsyCap profiles to lower burnout levels. A similar pattern was also observed among students, where higher PsyCap profiles were associated with lower levels of learning burnout (Song et al., 2025). Additionally, higher profiles were also associated with lower fatigue, anxiety, and depression, while low profiles showed higher distress and mixed profiles presented intermediate patterns.

Outcomes. Performance was examined in five studies. Most of them (Bouckennooghe et al., 2019; Choisy et al., 2025; Song et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025) found that participants in high PsyCap profiles reported significantly higher levels of job/academic performance compared to those in low or mixed profiles. In contrast, Djourova et al. (2019) did not find significant differences across profiles in in-role performance. Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) was also analyzed by Djourova et al. (2019); their results suggested that the highest OCB levels were observed in the profile high on all PsyCap dimensions, while profiles characterized by high self-efficacy and hope also scored higher than those lacking these components. Finally, Qin et al. (2022) reported that individuals with medium and high PsyCap profiles showed greater willingness to participate in food safety co-governance than those with low PsyCap, suggesting that overall PsyCap may be more influential than any single dimension.

Other variables. Other variables related to personal and contextual factors were also examined. On one hand, as for personal factors, high PsyCap profiles were associated with better coping with academic stress and more effective time management (Ramírez-Pérez & Zurita, 2024), greater likelihood of extroversion (Zhang et al., 2024a), higher Core Self-Evaluations (CSE, indexed as essentially a person's positive view of their own worth and capability; Choisy et al., 2025), greater professional competency among midwives (Ni et al., 2026), and more positive time perspective (understood as a positive relationship with the past and future; Pradhan & Anand, 2026). On the other hand, as for contextual factors, Liu et al. (2024) reported that adolescents with higher PsyCap profiles experienced significantly greater contact quality and quantity, although only contact quality significantly predicted profile membership. The study by He et al. (2025) found that working in a positive practice environment and having strong social support are the primary factors for teachers to belong to the high psychological capital profile. Finally, Zyberaj et al. (2022) found that high-quality Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) increased the stability of

Table 2*Descriptive analysis of all measurements (n = 195)*

	Authors (Year)	N (Sample gender)	Sample description	Method / Design	No. of profiles	PsyCap measure (reliability)	Profile name: Sample size	Variables distinguishing profiles	Country
1	Bouckennooghe et al. (2019)	Study 1: 171 (83% men).	Clerical staff employed in different occupational sectors	LPA / CS	6	PCQ-24 ($\alpha = .73-.91$)	Dominant Low Optimism: 2.92% Low: 6.43% Dominant Low Resilience: 15.79% Moderate High: 44.44% High: 4.09% High/Moderate: 26.32% Dominant Low Resilience: 6.84% Low: 5.26% High: 8.42%	-	Pakistan
2	Bouckennooghe et al. (2019)	Study 2: 190 (51% female).			7		Dominant Low Optimism: 13.68% Low/Moderate: 13.16% High/Moderate: 42.11% Moderate: 10.53%	Work engagement (s.), job performance (s.)	Ukraine
3	Choisay et al. (2025)	2,435 (79.5% men)	French Air Force NCO	LPA / CS	4	French PCQ-24 ($\alpha = .8-.88$)	Low Goal-Oriented: 15.1% Moderate PsyCap: 41.8% Low PsyCap: 3.2% High Goal-Oriented: 39.9%	Job satisfaction (s.), job performance (s.), sleep problems (s.), affective commitment (s.), continuance commitment (n.s.), core self-evaluation (s.)	France
4	Cui et al. (2025)	229 (100% women)	Breast cancer patients	LPA / CS	3	PCQ-C-24 ($\alpha = .91$)	Low PsyCap: 23.1% Moderate PsyCap: 48.1% High PsyCap: 28.8% Low self-efficacy and hope / High resilience and optimism: 1.54% High self-efficacy and hope / Low resilience and optimism: 3.88% Low self-efficacy / High hope, resilience and optimism: 6.11% High on all PsyCap dimensions: 88.47%	Quality of life (s.)	China
5	Djourova et al. (2019)	1,752 (52.6% female)	Employees from 45 Spanish organizations	LPA / CS	4	PCQ-12 ($\alpha = .71-.86$)		Intrinsic job satisfaction (s.), OCB (s.), in-role performance (n.s.),	Spain

Table 2 (continued)

	Authors (Year)	N (Sample gender)	Sample description	Method / Design	No. of profiles	PsyCap measure (reliability)	Profile name: Sample size	Variables distinguishing profiles	Country
6	Ferradás et al. (2019)	1,379 (73.7% female)	Teachers	LPA / CS	7	PsyCap ($\alpha = .7$ -.85)	Very Low in Efficacy, Hope, Optimism, and Resilience: 1.96% High in Efficacy, Hope, Optimism, and Resilience: 30.75% High in Optimism and Resilience/Low in Efficacy and Hope: .58% Low in Hope and Optimism, Very Low in Efficacy and Resilience: 9.28% Low in Efficacy and Resilience, Very Low in Hope and Optimism: 18.27% High in Hope and Optimism/Low in Efficacy and Resilience: 18,27% Moderate in Efficacy and Resilience/Low in Hope and Optimism: 29,88%	Burnout (s.)	Spain
7	Gao et al. (2023)	2,790 (97.67% female)	Kindergarten teachers	LPA / CS	3	Chinese Indigenous PsyCap Scale-40 ($\alpha = .93$ -.96)	Medium type: 46.3% Poor type: 10.5% Rich type: 43.2%	Work engagement (s.),	China
8	Geremias et al. (2022)	480 (54% male)	Undergraduate students	K-means / CS	4	Academic PCQ-24 ($\alpha = .7$ -.86)	Empty: 8.5% Fully: 40.6% Optimism-based: 30.4% Hopeful-efficacy-based: 20.5%	Internal learning in teams (s.)	Angola
9	Gillet et al. (2024)	1,200 (69.7% male)	Police officer trainees	GMM / LG	5	French PCQ ($\alpha = .65$ -.97)	Learning to Hate: 19.87% High Fit: 32.02% Moderate Fit: 19.64% Honeymoon-Hangover: 22.91% Low Fit: 5.56%	Work engagement (s.), subjective well-being (s.), perceived stress (s.)	France

Table 2 (continued)

	Authors (Year)	N (Sample gender)	Sample description	Method / Design	No. of profiles	PsyCap measure (reliability)	Profile name: Sample size	Variables distinguishing profiles	Country
10	He et al. (2025)	332 (95,78% female)	Clinical nursing teachers	LPA / CS	3	PCQ-R ($\alpha = .97$)	Low: 24.1% Moderate: 53.6% High: 22.3%	Practice environment of nursing (s.), perceived social support (s.), self-reported health (s.)	China
11	Liu et al. (2024)	1,501 (55,8% female).	Students from secondary school	LPA / CS	4	PPCQ ($\omega = .75-.93$)	Lowest: 7.1% Lower: 51% Mid: 34.5% High: 7.3%	Intergroup contact (contact quality, contact quantity) (s.)	China
12	Ni et al. (2026)	965 (100% female)	Midwives	LPA / CS	3	PPQ ($\alpha = .949$)	Low psychological capital: 56,37% Medium psychological capital - low resilience: 21.97% High psychological capital: 21.66%	Midwife core competency (s.)	China
13	Pradhan & Anand (2026)	540 (57% male)	Citizens	LPA / CS	3	Compound Psy-Cap Scale - 12 ($\alpha = .83$)	Low: 21.68% Moderate: 27.4% High: 50.92%	Time perspective (s.), mental health (s.)	India
14	Qin et al. (2022)	752 (52,39% female)	Citizens	LPA / CS	3	Citizen Psy-Cap-16 ($\alpha = .63-.75$)	Low: 2.53% Medium: 61.17% High: 36.3%	Willingness to participate in food safety social co-governance (s.)	China
15	Ramírez-Pérez & Zurita (2024)	102 (68,6% female)	Chilean undergraduate students	K-means / CS	4	Academic PCQ-12 (n.r.)	Latent: 6.86% Functional: 11.76% Complementary: 40.20% Optimal: 41.18%	Coping with Academic Stress (n.d.) Time Management (n.d.)	Chile
16	Song et al. (2024)	1,349 (50.6% female)	Full-time employees from various organizations and industries	LPA / CS	4	PCQ-12 ($\alpha = .74-.92$)	Low: 7.27% Low/Moderate: 23.57% High/Moderate: 55% High: 14.16%	Job satisfaction (s.), job performance (s.), turnover intention (s.),	China
17	Song et al. (2025)	541 (48.2% male)	Chinese undergraduates	LPA / CS	3	PPQ-26 ($\alpha = .8$)	Consistent high: 50.5% Consistent low: 38.1% Dominate loss-orientated: 11.4%	Learner burnout (s.)	China
18	Wang et al. (2025)	1,455 (80.4% female)	Nursing students	LPA / CS	3	PPQ-26 ($\alpha = .94$)	Avoidant: 31.2% Compromisers: 41.34% Motivator: 27.69%	Occupational stigma (s.)	China

Table 2 (continued)

	Authors (Year)	N (Sample gender)	Sample description	Method / Design	No. of profiles	PsyCap measure (reliability)	Profile name: Sample size	Variables distinguishing profiles	Country
19	Zhang et al. (2024a)	480 (88% female)	Junior nurses	LPA / CS	2	Chinese PCQ-20 ($\omega = .84$)	Low: 46.5% High: 53.5%	Burnout (s.), perceived stress (s.), introverted/extroverted (s.)	China
20	Zhang et al. (2024b)	427 (59.95% male)	Ischemic stroke patients	LPA / CS	3	PCQ-26 ($\alpha = .94$)	Deficient: 19.7% Medium: 52.5% Affluent: 27.8%	Perceived Stress (s.), Insomnia (s.),	China
21	Zyberaj et al. (2022)	185 (56.2% male)	Employees from various organizations	LTA / LG	5	PCQ-12 ($\alpha = .66-.79$)	Empty: T1: 18.1%; T2: 10.8% Dominant Efficacy: T1: 15.6%; T2: 16.2% Dominant Optimism/Hope: T1: 13.5%; T2: 22.7% Hopeful-Efficacy / Moderate High: T1: 24.3%; T2: 27.0% Fully / High: T1: 28.5%; T2: 23.2%	Leader-member exchange (s.)	Germany

Note. CIMEC = Questionnaire of Influences on Body Shape Model, BSQ = Body Shape Questionnaire.

high PsyCap profiles over time, highlighting its potential role as a protective factor.

Sociodemographic variables. Regarding sociodemographic variables used to examine differences in PsyCap profiles, gender ($n = 9$), education level ($n = 8$), and age ($n = 12$) were the most commonly used in the included studies.

With respect to gender, only four studies (Liu et al., 2024; Song et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024b) found significant differences, generally indicating that males were more likely to belong to more favorable profiles. However, contrary to the general trend, Wang et al. (2025) found an association between the avoidance profile and being male in a sample of nursing students.

Regarding education level, six studies showed that individuals with higher education levels were classified into the high PsyCap profiles (e.g., Qin et al., 2022; Song et al., 2024). In addition, Djourova et al. (2019) further showed that lower education combined with older age was linked to profiles characterized by low hope and self-efficacy but high resilience and optimism, whereas lower education with shorter job tenure was associated with profiles marked by low self-efficacy and high scores on the other PsyCap dimensions.

Finally, regarding age, only five studies (Djourova et al., 2019; He et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2024; Ni et al., 2026; Pradhan & Anand, 2026) found significant differences. Concretely, older age was more represented on high-level profiles.

Discussion

The scoping review synthesized 21 studies examining PsyCap using person-centered approaches, addressing two main research questions.

Regarding research question 1, the review revealed that the number of PsyCap profiles identified across studies ranged from 2 to 7, with 3-profile solutions being the most frequent. A key finding was the distinction between level-based and shape-based differences among these profiles. While most profiles reflected level-based differences (variations in PsyCap intensity such as low, medium, high), others revealed shape-based differences through mixed patterns (i.e., high self-efficacy and hope combined with resilience or optimism). These shape-based PsyCap profiles indicate that individuals may show strengths in some resources while lacking others, resulting in different ways of coping with challenges or pursuing goals. For example, having high optimism and hope but limited resilience when facing obstacles (e.g., Djourova et al., 2019). These findings suggest that PsyCap may not operate as a single homogeneous construct, but rather as a system of interacting psychological resources. Consistent with the Conservation of Resources (COR) framework (Hobfoll, 2002), the coexistence of balanced (level-based) and unbalanced (shape-based) configurations indicates that the shape (qualitative composition) of resources can be as important as the level (overall quantity). While previous reviews (Nguyen et al., 2024; Youssef-Morgan, 2024) emphasized the overall benefits of PsyCap, they overlooked the intra-individual diversity revealed by person-centered analyses.

Hence, these findings highlight why adopting a person-centered perspective is important: not all PsyCap is equal.

Concerning research question 2, the reviewed studies identified a broad range of variables differentiating PsyCap profiles, which were clustered into four main categories: (1) well-being (e.g., work engagement, job satisfaction, subjective well-being), (2) discomfort (e.g., stress, burnout, insomnia), (3) outcomes (e.g., job performance, OCB), and (4) other variables. Across studies, higher PsyCap profiles were consistently associated with greater well-being and performance, along with lower psychological distress. Moreover, several studies examined personal and contextual antecedents of profile membership, including gender, education, leadership quality, teaching experience, and intergroup contact. High-quality Leader-Member Exchange (Zyberaj et al., 2022) and supportive organizational environments (He et al., 2025) were associated with more adaptive profiles, highlighting that PsyCap configurations are embedded within social and organizational contexts rather than being purely individual attributes. This pattern reinforces the notion that PsyCap profiles reflect dynamic resource configurations shaped by both individual characteristics and environmental conditions, in line with the Job Demands-Resources framework (Bakker et al., 2023).

Taken together, the findings indicate that PsyCap profiles are not only linked to outcomes in a linear way but also embedded within broader patterns of individual functioning. In particular, differences between profiles appear to be meaningfully reflected across motivational, affective, and behavioral domains, suggesting that PsyCap profiles may act as integrative indicators of how psychological resources translate into functioning at work and in life contexts.

Theoretical and practical implications

This study has several theoretical implications for PsyCap profiles research. First, the present review upgrades the interpretation of PsyCap profiles by distinguishing between level-based and shape-based profile solutions. From a COR perspective, PsyCap functions as a resource caravan in which its four components co-occur and reinforce each other (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017), which may partly explain why similar configurations (level-based) emerge across diverse samples. Whereas shape-based profiles reflecting distinct combinations of PsyCap resources are less frequently observed. In fact, person-centered approaches have proven particularly useful for capturing intra-individual configurations obscured in variable-centered designs (Rey-Martí et al., 2022). Secondly, previous studies have used inconsistent terminology and conceptual boundaries to describe similar profiles, limiting the comparability and cumulative interpretation of findings (Dawkins et al., 2013; Nguyen et al., 2024). The distinction between level-based and shape-based profiles proposed in this review offers a theoretically grounded framework for interpreting profile solutions more consistently and integrating evidence across studies. In other words, this review advances the conceptual

development of PsyCap profile research by providing a clearer framework for interpreting profile solutions.

In terms of practical implications, the findings of this review offer useful guidance for designing interventions based on distinct PsyCap profiles, rather than generic interventions. By identifying how different combinations of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism relate to outcomes such as work engagement, performance, or perceived stress, practitioners in both educational and organizational settings could tailor interventions to strengthen psychological resources in vulnerable groups. For individuals classified into level-based profiles (e.g., low or moderate PsyCap), broad PsyCap micro-interventions targeting all four dimensions simultaneously may be most effective, as the overall resource deficit is relatively homogeneous (Luthans et al., 2006). However, for individuals presenting shape-based profiles, a more targeted approach is needed. For instance, individuals in profiles characterized by high self-efficacy and hope but low resilience and optimism (identified across two studies; Djourova et al., 2019; Geremias et al., 2022) may benefit from resilience-focused interventions such as acceptance and commitment therapy or resilient coaching programs (Loghman et al., 2025). Importantly, recent meta-analytic evidence also suggests that the frequency and duration of intervention sessions should be tailored to the target dimension. For example, while a single session may suffice for optimism development, hope, efficacy, and resilience require more sustained programs (Loghman et al., 2025). Furthermore, the review points to the value of integrating PsyCap profile analysis into human resource practices, training programs, and well-being initiatives aimed at fostering sustainable development and adaptive functioning in diverse populations (Luthans et al., 2006). However, it is important to note that profiles of PsyCap remain an emerging area of research, and practical recommendations should therefore be interpreted with caution until further empirical evidence is available. While this review has provided an initial synthesis of the existing evidence on PsyCap profiles, further research is needed.

Limitations and future research

There are some limitations associated with this study. First, although a systematic search was conducted, some relevant studies may have been missed, especially those published in languages such as Korean or Russian, or in non-indexed journals. Second, the diversity of study designs, populations, and measurement tools complicates direct comparisons and limits the possibility of drawing firm generalizations. As the field matures and the number of primary studies increases, future research should move toward meta-analytic approaches to provide a statistical estimation of the strength of associations between PsyCap profiles and outcomes. Third, the current lack of consensus regarding the number and configuration of profiles suggests that methodological strategies and cultural settings significantly influence latent class identification. Future studies should also distinguish between level-based and shape-based profile differences, as both theoretical and statistical criteria

for doing so remain underdeveloped. Methodological innovations such as network analysis may provide new insights into the dynamic interplay among PsyCap dimensions. Fourth, as 19 of the 21 studies were cross-sectional, there is a critical need for longitudinal designs to examine the temporal stability of profile membership and identify the contextual factors, such as leadership or life events, that drive profile transitions over time. Finally, future research should address the current lack of a unifying theoretical model that explains how PsyCap dimensions interact and why certain configurations emerge. Developing an integrative framework could guide the selection of variables in future studies and improve comparability across contexts.

Conclusions

This scoping review of 21 studies highlights that not all Psychological Capital (PsyCap) is equal, identifying a latent structure that typically ranges from 2 to 7 profiles. By distinguishing between level-based and shape-based differences, this study clarified that PsyCap may manifest as both a unidimensional intensity gradient and a complex system of interacting resources. These shape-based configurations provide a more nuanced lens for understanding why individuals with similar overall levels of PsyCap may exhibit different behavioral and adaptive outcomes. Consequently, practitioners should move beyond generic “one-size-fits-all” programs toward tailored interventions designed to address the specific resource configurations of different subgroups, thereby optimizing well-being and performance across diverse contexts. In sum, the present scoping review provides a contemporary map of PsyCap profile research by integrating findings across populations, methodologies, and profile solutions. It also identifies important methodological and conceptual gaps (e.g., predominance of cross-sectional designs) that provide a foundation for future theoretical and empirical developments in this field.

Author contributions

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

Data availability statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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