

# ***Journey to Hope* Help for People Increases Business Productivity**

## **Introduction and Background**

Journey to Hope provides programs primarily focused on support for individuals who are going through life transitions, such as grief, job search, and health problems, to “[grow] into their best selves”. As our name states, this is a journey into increased hope. But do our programs actually increase hope? Does that result in a measurable benefits for participants? Do our programs have a positive economic impact for society as a whole? That is the essence of the questions that we want to answer.

To develop an approach to address these questions, Journey to Hope recruited Dr. Harry Stone (retired Battelle Senior Research Scientist) to serve as Principal Investigator with Dr. Laurie Laning (statistician and retired P&G executive) and Dr. Ted Barrett (neuropsychologist and Journey to Hope Board Chair) rounding out the research team. The research team is donating their time for this state-of-the-art investigation. A charter for the research was submitted in February 2016 and work began soon thereafter.

Review of the psychological and business management literature shows that improvement in Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and its sub-categories (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) has a positive impact on physical and mental health, longevity, caregiving, job search behaviors, and job performance. Therefore, change in PsyCap was selected as an objective measure of improvement in the mental attributes of JtH participants. We needed to know, “are Journey to Hope programs significantly improving these beneficial mental attributes (collectively PsyCap)”? The research team submitted a research proposal to Mind Garden and received approval to use (at no cost) the validated Psychological Capital Questionnaire to determine if participants are experiencing measurable changes in PsyCap scores after participation in JtH programs. Participants in Journey to Hope programs are being asked to voluntarily answer the PsyCap Questionnaire (and a few questions on desired outcomes) before and after completion of programs so that the researchers will data needed to measure changes in psychological benefits.

Using relationships in the literature, the research team will evaluate how changes in PsyCap for program participants translates into desired outcomes for the participant, like shorter duration of job search, and for society, like increased productivity that impact corporate profit. While we have heard many heartwarming stories of the impact that our programs have had on the lives of our participants, we look forward to having robust, unbiased scientific analysis to show that our participants really are “journeying to hope” and that our programs are having a significant impact both in meeting participants’ needs, and in economic impacts for our region.

## **PsyCap and Desirable Business Outcomes**

The literature review showed significant impacts of positive organizational behavior (POB; hope, optimism, and resilience) on desired workplace outcomes (job performance, job satisfaction, work happiness, and organizational commitment). POB explains 4% to 15% of performance outcomes (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Hope was significantly statistically correlated with desired job performance outcomes, including job satisfaction, work happiness, organizational commitment, and self-reported job performance (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). In the cases analyzed, this translated to \$2,800 - \$5,500 profit per employee (average pay of \$50,000) statistically correlated with the PsyCap score (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). A meta-analysis of the impact of PsyCap showed a positive correlation with employee performance (Luthans, Avey, Avolio, & Peterson, 2010).

Absenteeism results from a variety of causes in addition to personal illness, such as caregiving and bereavement. Research findings demonstrate that illness, considered involuntary absenteeism, is lower as PsyCap levels are higher. The PsyCap score explained 11% of involuntary absenteeism. Hope subscores were shown to be a stronger predictor of involuntary absenteeism than PsyCap scores (Avey, Patera, & West, 2006). Voluntary and involuntary absenteeism is negatively statistically correlated with Hope subscale scores and with PsyCap scores - the higher the Hope subscore and PsyCap scores, the lower the absenteeism (Avey et al., 2006).

Employee turnover generates costs for companies. PsyCap was demonstrated to reduce workplace stress, thereby reducing secondary impact of intention to quit and performing job search activities (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009).

## **Summary of Preliminary Results for Employers of Participants**

Change in PsyCap is an objective measure that is statistically correlated with improved workplace productivity. Therefore, the amount of change in PsyCap can be used to estimate positive economic impacts that employers of the participants would be expected to realize. This relationship was used to estimate economic impact accruing to employers of the participants in JtH services.

The mean PsyCap for JtH participants rose significantly from the beginning to the end of programs. An average 10% increase in PsyCap scores was observed for those participating in the JtH programs relative to a control group. This level of PsyCap improvement is estimated to increase employers' bottom lines by an average of \$2,822 per year per each of their employees participating in JtH programs. There were 461 people that participated in the JtH programs in 2016. Therefore, improved PsyCap in JtH participants had an estimated regional business productivity (dollar value of output) improvement estimated to be \$1.3 million. Because this is a preliminary study with a small sample size, uncertainty around the mean economic impact is high. The study is continuing to increase confidence in the economic impacts. However, preliminary results show employers' bottom lines benefit as their employees benefit from JtH programs.

## Literature Cited

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