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We can be heroes at work: the relationship between psychological capital, motivation and well-being during the great resignation

We can be
heroes at work

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Abstract

Purpose – The Great Resignation has led to a significant increase in the number of people quitting their jobs due to reasons such as stagnant wages, rising cost of living, job dissatisfaction and safety concerns. Therefore, the aim of this study is that it is important to help people develop better cognitive resources to face adversity.

Design/methodology/approach – The Great Resignation has led to a significant increase in the number of people quitting their jobs due to reasons such as stagnant wages, rising cost of living, job dissatisfaction and safety concerns. Therefore, it is important to help people develop better cognitive resources to face adversity. In this study, we administered a questionnaire to 250 employees to determine the variables that could help them build cognitive resources. These variables included the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence and affiliation), psychological capital, motivation regulation (within the self-determination theory) and well-being (assessed by self-esteem, positive emotions, positive automatic thoughts and vitality). The results revealed that satisfaction of basic needs is associated with better psychological capital and more self-autonomous behavior, which leads to higher psychological well-being. These findings are discussed in the paper, emphasizing the importance of management and work context that satisfy the basic needs and help to build resources with psychological capital.

Findings – The results revealed that satisfaction of basic needs is associated with better psychological capital and more self-autonomous behavior, which leads to higher psychological well-being. These findings are discussed in the paper, emphasizing the importance of management and work context that satisfy the basic needs and help to build resources with psychological capital.

Originality/value – Highlight the importance of consequences of the Great Resignation and the need to internationalize this concept.

Keywords Motivation, Great resignation, Psychological capital, Cognitive resources, Well-being, Basic needs, Self-determination theory

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Motivation is a hypothetical construct used to describe the internal and/or external forces that initiate, direct, sustain and determine the intensity of behavior (Vallerand and Thill, 1993; Pinder, 1997). Motivation has been extensively studied as a means of understanding the manner in which the traits of individual workers interact with their work environment. Over the years, shifts in



economic conditions and management styles have influenced how people work and what they prioritize in their jobs. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic further altered people's life goals, including goal-setting at work (Godinić and Obrenovic, 2020; Hamm *et al.*, 2022). To navigate this adversity, individuals drew on internal resources to enhance their well-being (Formica and Sfodera, 2022; Ng and Stanton, 2023). It is therefore valuable to understand these resources in order that we may better cultivate them. In this study, we observed the interplay between motivation and internal resources, measured using psychological capital, during the 2020 pandemic, as well as the resulting mass departure trend referred to as the Great Resignation.

The Great Resignation context

The now widely discussed Great Resignation was first popularized by authors in the US context (Sheather and Slattery, 2021; Sull *et al.*, 2022). The phenomenon is defined as the uptick in people leaving their jobs due to a combination of factors including wage stagnation, the rising cost of living, job dissatisfaction and safety concerns in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Swanson *et al.*, 2022). According to Microsoft's work trend data (2021), 41% of the global workforce are contemplating leaving their job in the next year, with 46% planning a major career transition. Both white-collar and blue-collar sectors are feeling the effects of the Great Resignation (Sull *et al.*, 2022).

Several factors contribute to the Great Resignation. These include a toxic workplace, unfair compensation, poor leadership, the feeling of being undervalued, uninspiring work, workplace rigidity, generational disparities among employees, limited opportunities for growth and constrained freedom of expression (Kundu *et al.*, 2022). These external factors have prompted people to re-evaluate their life paths, making changes driven by internal and personal reasons (Shamblaw *et al.*, 2021). One consequence is "quiet quitting", which refers to a limitation of employees' commitment to accomplishing their goals and a lack of engagement (Harter, 2022; Harter, 2023). Although examples of such behavior predate the COVID-19 pandemic, the Great Resignation has amplified its prevalence. It is therefore urgent that companies improve their understanding of employee motivation and implement strategies to sustain it in order to mitigate the effects of the Great Resignation. (Formica and Sfodera, 2022).

Serenko (2022) states that the Great Resignation can be explained at three levels: the individual level (e.g. motivation), the organizational level (e.g. turnover), and the national level (e.g. uncertainty in the pension system).

The individual level underscores employees' need for self-knowledge, viewing it as a reservoir of resources for achieving better well-being (Gorman and Pauleen, 2016). Individuals enhance this self-knowledge by developing, acquiring, and applying skills beneficial to their personal life (Serenko, 2022). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, employees have begun seeking more flexible job opportunities in order to achieve a balance between their personal and professional lives (Agovino, 2021). A significant shift in employees' motivation has been observed (Weinstein and Hirsch, 2023), which has disrupted numerous managerial practices, forced swiftly to cope. Managers found themselves needing to support employees in various capacities, such as help in managing work-life balance, employee assistance programs, initiatives for employee socialization, effective wellness programs, appropriate IT (Information Technology) infrastructures, proper treatment and supervision, a safe and healthy workplace, a sense of belonging, and longer paid leave (Tessema *et al.*, 2022).

At the organizational level, the Great Resignation has had profound consequences, resulting most notably in heightened turnover rates. This shift has deprived organizations of a crucial competitive advantage, directly resulting in a loss of productivity and lower goal attainment (Pisano *et al.*, 2017), damage to brand image, a shortfall of mentors to train new employees, and a siphoning off of knowledge by competing employers (Manhart and Thalmann, 2015; Massingham, 2020). This fallout has been accompanied by an increase in psychological distress among remaining employees due to the loss of important interpersonal relationships (Kmieciak, 2022).

At the national level, the Great Resignation severely impacts society by depleting national human capital, a primary driver of national value creation (Lin and Edvinsson, 2012). To counteract these trends, Serenko (2022) suggests a multi-level intervention: managers should harness the available human capital more efficiently, facilitating and supporting knowledge-based initiatives. Organizations should recognize the importance of onboarding and offboarding, embracing the automation of knowledge and experience-based business processes, and support managers in exploring opportunities to restructure their services to optimize intra-organizational knowledge flows. In essence, organizations must recalibrate their strategies, adapt their products, and alter their operational practices in order to make the best use of human capital. A pressing question emerges: Is the Great Resignation a facet of the US employment landscape, or can it serve as a global model explaining shifts in career paths (Moulier Boutang, 2023)? Case in point, in France, roughly 500,000 individuals working under permanent contract quit their jobs in the first quarter of 2022, marking a 20% increase from 2021 (Lagouge *et al.*, 2022). In France, resigning without the agreement of one's employer results in a forfeiture of unemployment benefits. Furthermore, unemployment benefit legislation has recently been tightened due to the prevailing economic situation (Moulier Boutang, 2023). This creates a unique context in which employees, spurred to introspection by the pandemic, have sought out more meaningful work, only to find themselves constrained by economic realities. This is particularly relevant given that the pandemic followed intense civil unrest in France (e.g. the Yellow Vest movement in 2019), which had already strained the national human capital, setting the stage for the Great Resignation to have an even greater impact (Mahfud and Adam-Troian, 2021). Whether in France or the US, there remains a scarcity of research on the underlying causes of the Great Resignation (Newman *et al.*, 2022).

Regarding the operational effects of the Great Resignation, Malmendier (2021) suggests that its impacts stem primarily from changes in people's affective, cognitive and behavioral processes and resources. Hence, for managers and organizations, the emphasis should be on "learning how to use human capital effectively." This means comprehending employees' unique personal attributes and resources and devising ways to motivate them in the post-pandemic period (Kuzior *et al.*, 2022). There is a clear imperative to assist workers in building human capital to achieve improved well-being at work. While theories such as the happy-productive worker thesis suggest that happy employees perform better at work, it is essential for managers to promote an organizational climate that encourages "positive organizational behaviors" (Luthans and Youssef, 2007; Diener *et al.*, 2020). Studies show that drawing a direct causal relationship between well-being at work and performance can be intricate, given that this relationship is based on several characteristics such as the work context (Imhof and Andresen, 2018), structural elements at work (Groenland, 1990), role ambiguity (Mañas *et al.*, 2018) and perceived support or attitudes (Grossmeier *et al.*, 2020). In examining this subject, researchers have often looked at elements of well-being, such as motivation and positive emotions (Fisher and Noble, 2004). While many theories detail the relationship between motivation at work and well-being, only one approach, the self-determination theory (SDT), considers behaviors from an organismic perspective. The organismic perspective in SDT is a psychological framework that emphasizes the growth and development of individuals as they strive to fulfill their innate psychological needs (Ryan and Deci, 2017). It recognizes that individuals have intrinsic motivation and a natural tendency towards self-actualization. The organismic perspective in SDT highlights the importance of creating environments that foster well-being and motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2002). The link between the organismic perspective in SDT and the Great Resignation phenomenon is that individuals may be leaving their jobs due to external factors (Kundu *et al.*, 2022). So, strengthening internal and organismic aspects can help individuals cope with adversity caused by these external reasons (Ryan and Deci, 2002). That is why the framework of self-determination theory is an ideal target for expressing motivation in the face of the Great Resignation.

Review of the literature

Self-determination theory at the workplace. The SDT is a widely known theory of motivation that posits high-quality engagement to be grounded in both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as demonstrated by [Ryan and Deci \(2017\)](#). SDT espouses an organismic point of view of human behaviors, highlighting how biological, social and cultural factors can enhance or hinder psychological growth and engagement. [Deci et al. \(2017\)](#) developed five subtheories within SDT to explore different aspects of human motivation (cognitive evaluation theory, organismic integration theory, causality orientations theory, basic needs theory and goal contents theory). Each of these subtheories aims to deepen our understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, fundamental psychological needs and the relationship between motivation and goal attainment. By developing these subtheories, Deci and Ryan sought to provide a solid conceptual framework for explaining and predicting motivated behaviors. The cognitive evaluation theory, a subtheory of SDT, specifies the factors that facilitate and undermine autonomous and intrinsic motivation. [Deci and Ryan \(2000\)](#) argue that three psychological fundamental needs are essential to understand why people engage in a specific activity, as well as their specific choice of activity. Self-motivation stems from the satisfaction of these three basic psychological needs. Therefore, for organizations aiming to foster self-motivation, it is crucial to provide an autonomy-supportive context that allows individuals to fulfill their autonomous goals ([Deci et al., 2017](#)). This sub-theory emphasizes the three basic psychological needs one must satisfy to lead a fulfilling life. These needs are innate and fundamental, likened to a living organism's need for nutrients ([Deci and Ryan, 2000](#)). These needs encompass autonomy (e.g. "the extent to which I am the origin of my actions"), competence (e.g. "how effective I feel in what I do") and relatedness (e.g. "the quality of my interpersonal relationships"). The satisfaction of these three psychological needs enhances intrinsic motivation, leading to positive effects on individuals' psychological well-being. [Diener \(2009\)](#) suggests two approaches to understanding well-being: the hedonic approach, which emphasizes happiness and avoidance of displeasure, and the eudemonic approach, stipulating that well-being is attained through self-realization and the pursuit of meaning ([Diener, 2009](#)). In a work setting, failure to meet these three psychological needs can result in adverse effects on psychological well-being ([Deci et al., 2017](#)).

The organismic integration theory states that intrinsically motivated behavior occurs when people engage in an activity for its inherent enjoyment, rather than due to external reasons. Conversely, extrinsically motivated behavior occurs when people engage in an activity to gain a reward or avoid sanctions. Research has shown that environments that foster intrinsic motivation leads to better psychological well-being ([Gagné and Deci, 2005](#); [Deci et al., 2017](#); [Breugh et al., 2018](#); [Howard et al., 2020](#)). In order to excel at the workplace, commitment and flexibility are paramount, especially when these are driven by self-motivation ([Doshi and McGregor, 2015](#)). SDT highlights the importance of high autonomous motivation as a predictor of well-being and job performance ([Stone et al., 2009](#)). Organizations must therefore foster an autonomy-supportive work environment, which can be achieved through management practices that promote the three basic needs.

The organismic integration theory, a subtheory of SDT, is characterized by a self-determination continuum representing varying levels of behavioral integration and is dependent on various types of regulation ([Deci et al., 2017](#)). Extrinsic motivation refers to activities that are not resonate with the individual or are not linked to the intrinsic value of the activity. Introjected extrinsic motivation occurs when activities are undertaken under external pressure to protect self-esteem or avoid negative emotions, such as anxiety. Identified extrinsic motivation is evident in those who experience a greater sense of autonomy in their behaviors, largely because these behaviors align with their personally held objectives and identities. Integrated extrinsic motivation occurs when people are motivated in activities aligns seamlessly with their true self. Finally, amotivation is the total absence of intentional regulation, reflecting a lack of motivation.

SDT offers a foundation theoretical framework for understanding motivation at work and has gained international recognition. The Great Resignation external factors can negatively impact

individuals' ability to fulfill their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Patrick *et al.*, 2023). As a result, individuals may feel motivated to make changes in their lives, including quitting their jobs, in order to seek environments that better fulfill these needs and promote their psychological well-being and optimal functioning. Although most studies on the Great Resignation have been conducted in the US context, research shows that this phenomenon has spread to a number of countries, including France, regardless of differences in workplace structures and related laws (Apouey *et al.*, 2020; Guan *et al.*, 2020; Lambert *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, SDT thus serves as a universally applicable theoretical framework for understanding motivation in the context of the Great Resignation. To further elucidate the psychological consequences of the Great Resignation at the individual level, it could prove valuable to employ SDT, translating theory into practice to pave the way for more autonomy-supportive motivational environments to provide managers and individuals with internal resources to combat the external reasons for the Great Resignation and to promote an autonomy-supportive context.

Supporting autonomous motivation: psychological capital. The promotion of this autonomy-supportive context can be based on specific motivational management strategies (Hardré and Reeve, 2009), but depending on potential responses to the Great Resignation (Serenko, 2022), a more effective approach might be to empower employees by enhancing their individual psychological resources (Fiedler, 1986) within the framework of SDT (Ferraro *et al.*, 2018). Such a strategy may aid workers in coping with the Great Resignation at both the individual and organizational levels (Serenko, 2022).

Psychological capital, or PsyCap, was developed by Luthans and colleagues (Luthans *et al.*, 2004, 2007a, b, 2015). They demonstrated PsyCap to be a construct encompassing individual psychological resources, which are linked to desired employee attitudes, behaviors and performance outcomes such as creativity, problem-solving, innovation, job searching, well-being and work-family conflict. PsyCap is defined as an individual's positive psychological state of development, represented by four core factors forming the "HERO" acronym: hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism.

Hope involves perseverance in attaining goals and finding alternative routes to achieve success (Luthans *et al.*, 2006). It is closely aligned to motivation, described as a "positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful agency (towards goals) and pathways (planning to meet goals)" (Snyder *et al.*, 1991, p. 300). Hope refers to a cognitive state in which one can set realistic goals ("willpower") and the ability to reach them through self-determination and the seeking of alternative ways ("waypower") (Luthans *et al.*, 2015). Efficacy in PsyCap is akin to the widely recognized concept of self-efficacy, introduced by Bandura *et al.* (1997). It refers to an individual's confidence to undertake challenging tasks and put in the necessary effort to succeed at them. Luthans *et al.* (2015) designate efficacious people as those who set high goals for themselves and self-select into difficult tasks. They welcome challenges, are highly self-motivated, invest the necessary efforts to accomplish their goals and persevere when faced with obstacles. Resilience is the capacity to bounce back from adversity, conflicts and failures. Masten (2001, p. 228) refers to "patterns of positive adaptation during or following significant adversity or risk". Resilience applies to the positive consequences that arise when people use developmental strategies to enhance psychological growth. Luthans *et al.* (2015) state that resilient individuals possess specific assets, including cognitive abilities or the capacity of self-regulation, aiding in enhancing resilience. Optimism, mainly popularized by Seligman (1998), is an attributional style in which people interpret positive events with personal, permanent and pervasive causes, and negative events with external, temporary and situation-specific factors. Moreover, optimism embodies the adoption of positive expectations about current success and future outcomes. As optimists have positive expectations for the future, they tend to persist in the face of adversity. Optimistic workers embrace change, see the opportunities that the future holds, and focus on capitalizing on them (Meier, 2016). The four factors of PsyCap interact synergistically, with each factor adding unique variance and

becoming additive to overall capital (Luthans *et al.*, 2015). Scholars argue that PsyCap is important in equipping people with the internal resources they need to thrive in an economic and organizational landscape in which downsizing and the slashing of training budgets could become the norm (McKinley *et al.*, 1995).

Individuals need to possess strong PsyCap to navigate through uncertain times and adapt to the changing work environment (Cutliff, 2022). This enables individuals to remain resilient, optimistic and hopeful, even in the face of adversity. It empowers them to proactively seek out opportunities, embrace challenges and effectively manage their emotions and responses to workplace changes (Hayek, 2012). By cultivating and harnessing their PsyCap, individuals are better equipped to thrive amidst the challenges posed by the Great Resignation. It allows them to maintain a positive mindset, make informed decisions about their career paths, and take actions that align with their personal values and aspirations (Luthans *et al.*, 2014). Ultimately, PsyCap serves as a valuable asset for individuals to successfully navigate through the changing landscape of work and make choices that contribute to their overall well-being and career satisfaction (Chen and Chen, 2018).

Building internal resources to cope with the Great Resignation

The development of internal resources such as those described in PsyCap (Luthans and Youssef, 2004), could be of help in promoting motivation and well-being. This relationship has been confirmed by a smattering of studies (Page and Nilsson, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2019). While many of these were conducted in the US, only a few were performed in France, and they were quite recent (Choisy *et al.*, 2022). The promotion of positive organizational behavior has been studied in relation with well-being (Cartwright and Cooper, 2014), emotions (Diener *et al.*, 2020) emotional intelligence (McClellan *et al.*, 2017) and self-esteem (Pan *et al.*, 2014). However, we found no studies about the relation between PsyCap, motivation and well-being in an organizational context in France. A work environment that promotes the fulfillment of the three basic needs enables the development of adapted psychological resources, which provides for higher and more sustained well-being (Deci *et al.*, 2017). In turn, feeling competent and positive at work helps aids in sustaining these resources, ensuring optimal motivation levels (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2018). Additionally, developing psychological resources such as PsyCap could assist in the internalizing of positive behaviors, thereby reinforcing performance at work (Luthans *et al.*, 2010).

The objective of this study is to explain the motivational changes related to the Great Resignation by expressing them at an individual level, in the framework of two theories: SDT and PsyCap. A better understanding of motivation and its connection to well-being can provide insights for managers and organizations that have had to cope quickly with the Great Resignation in recent years. The operationalization of PsyCap and the demonstration of its links with motivation could provide concrete, applicable and scientifically grounded solutions to improve human capital.

It is therefore relevant to study the relationship between motivation, psychological capital and well-being to gain a better understanding of the promotion of positive organizational behaviors and a focused development of internal individual resources. Drawing on the SDT and PsyCap theories, we hypothesize that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs correlates to improved well-being and a better autonomous motivation, especially when considering the PsyCap's participation as a construct of individual resources. Specifically, we will test the following structural equation model: the satisfaction of basic needs will impact motivation regulation, and in turn, motivation will affect well-being, as postulated by SDT. The satisfaction of basic needs should foster the building of psychological resources, having an effect on psychological capital. In return, psychological capital is anticipated to have an influence on both motivation regulation and well-being.

Methods

Participants and procedure

A total of 250 native French-speaking participants (40.9% male, 59.9% female), were recruited from human resources departments throughout France, aged from 20 to 59 years ($M = 37.3$; Standard Deviation (SD) = 11.2). The surveyed employees were mainly white-collar workers from service sectors including banking, retail, consulting, public service and industry. We recruited participants from diverse sectors due to the widespread effects of the Great Resignation across all types of activities (Serenko, 2022). The participants were approached through phone calls made via a motivation consulting company. They were not offered any specific incentives (i.e. no compensation). They completed the entire questionnaire via a secure online link. All participants gave their consent to participate in the study anonymously. Completion of the questionnaire typically took around 20 min. All items were randomized, except for those collecting sociodemographic data and were ranked from 1 (“Not at all”) to 7 (“Completely”). The researchers involved in the study had no information about the identity of participants.

We used quantitative research because it offers several advantages, including the ability to generalize findings to a larger population, robust and reliable results through statistical analysis, objectivity and replicability through standardized measurements and methods, and efficient collection of large amounts of data for studying trends and patterns (Kelle, 2006). Quantifying variables allows for the analysis of relationships and making predictions, while comparability enables the identification of similarities and differences across different groups, time periods or contexts (Rahman, 2020).

Measures

Motivation. The revised motivation at work scale (R-MAWS), developed by Gagné *et al.* (2015), is a prominent instrument for assessing motivation at work within the SDT framework. It has been translated into ten languages using a sample of over 4,500 employees (Gagné *et al.*, 2012). The initial versions were concurrently validated in both French and English. A significant advantage of the R-MAWS is that its validation shows theoretically coherent and significant correlations with the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, as measured by the work-related basic need satisfaction scale (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2010), vitality (Vallerand *et al.*, 2006), burnout (assessed by Maslach burnout inventory, Maslach, 1996) and job performance (Griffin *et al.*, 2007).

R-MAWS comprises 19 items: 3 assess the social component of extrinsic motivation (e.g. “To get others’ approval”), 3 for the material component of extrinsic regulation (e.g. “Because others offer me greater job security if I put enough effort into my job”), 4 for introjected regulation (e.g. “Because it makes me feel proud of myself”), 3 for identified regulation (e.g. “Because putting effort into this job aligns with my personal values”), 3 for intrinsic motivation (e.g. “Because I have fun doing my job”), and the final 3 for amotivation (e.g. “I don’t know why I’m doing this job”).

Basic psychological needs. Basic psychological needs were assessed using the basic psychological needs at work scale (BPNWS) developed by Brien *et al.* (2012) in line with the SDT framework. The scale assesses the satisfaction levels in three domains: autonomy, competence and relatedness. The authors confirmed the three-factor structure and its significant correlations with optimism, intrinsic motivation, distress (negative), well-being and procedural justice. The BPNWS comprises 21 items revolving around the three basic needs: 7 items refer to the autonomy need (e.g. “I feel under pressure at work”), 6 items for the competence need (e.g. “I acquired interesting new skills at work”) and 8 items for relatedness (e.g. “People at work care about me”).

PsyCap. The psychological capital questionnaire (PCQ) was developed by Luthans *et al.* (2007a, b). We opted for the standard version, PCQ-24, composed of 24 items. Numerous

studies have utilized this scale, establishing that PsyCap correlated with employee attitudes, behaviors and performance (e.g. [Avey et al., 2011](#)). The 24 items are separated into the four dimensions of PsyCap: 6 items for hope (e.g. “Right now I see myself as being pretty successful at work”), 6 items for efficacy (e.g. “I feel confident presenting information to a group of colleagues”), 6 items for resilience (e.g. “I usually take stressful things at work in stride”) and 6 items for optimism (e.g. “When things are uncertain for me at work, I usually expect the best”). The French-speaking version was validated by [Choisy et al. \(2022\)](#) in a study involving 3,665 military personnel.

Well-being. To assess well-being, we considered four dimensions: self-esteem, positive emotions, positive automatic thoughts and vitality.

- (1) Self-esteem is defined as an evaluation of oneself and one’s own personal values. We assessed self-esteem using the well-known self-esteem scale by [Rosenberg \(1965\)](#), composed of 10 items (e.g. “Sometimes I feel really useless”), translated into French by [Gana et al. \(2005\)](#). Self-esteem is a common measure of well-being at work (see [Pierce and Gardner, 2004](#), for a complete review of the literature).
- (2) Positive emotions were evaluated based on their frequency with the positive affect and negative affect scale (PANAS) by [Watson et al. \(1988\)](#), validated in French by [Gaudreau et al. \(2006\)](#). We chose to focus on the component of the scale related to positive emotions, which is composed of ten items. Participants indicated the extent to which they felt these emotions in the past week, with items such as “Interested” and “Proud”. Research has shown that positive emotions play a pivotal role in explaining well-being at work ([Diener et al., 2020](#)), and have a direct causal effect with personal resources influencing work engagement ([Ouweneel et al., 2012](#)).
- (3) Positive automatic thoughts, a construct coming derived from cognitive psychology, are often employed for cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) patient evaluations. These thoughts, encompassing ideas and images, represent how an individual perceives their life ([Curwen et al., 2018](#)). They directly influence our behaviors and emotions. While there are multiple versions of the automatic thoughts questionnaire (ATQ), French researchers chose to validate a version composed of 18 items (ATQ-18-Fr, [Lebreuilly and Alsaleh, 2019](#)). The questionnaire consists of two components: one focused on positive automatic thoughts, with 10 items (e.g. “I feel really good”, “I am luckier than most people”). Positive automatic thoughts have rarely been investigated in studies about motivation at work, despite their association with psychopathological states, including depression, anxiety and stress, often a cause for leaving jobs during the Great Resignation ([Jiskrova, 2022](#)).
- (4) Vitality is described as a positive feeling of aliveness and energy ([Ryan and Frederick, 1997](#)). It is an important indicator of health and well-being at work, as people with high levels of vitality are more resistant to stress and anxiety ([Van Scheppingen et al., 2014](#)). Vitality at work has often been studied within the framework of SDT ([Ryan and Deci, 2008](#); [Ryan et al., 2010](#)). A widely recognized questionnaire for evaluating vitality is the subjective vitality scale ([Ryan and Frederick, 1997](#)), composed of 7 items. This scale has been shown to correlate positively to self-esteem and self-regulation ([Nix et al., 1999](#)), with items such as “I feel alive and vital” or “I look forward to each new day”.

Statistical analysis

A correlation analysis was conducted to identify significant relationships among our variables. Following this, we performed structural equation modeling (SEM) to test our

hypothesis. SEM is a statistical technique used to analyze complex relationships between three and more variables. It allows researchers to examine both direct and indirect effects among variables and test theoretical models. SEM is particularly useful when studying latent variables, which are not directly observable but inferred from various measured variables (Iacobucci, 2010). All analyses were conducted using SPSS® (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) 24.0 and AMOS® (Analysis of Moment Structures) 22.0.

Results

Preliminary analysis

The participants were 37.2 years old on average (SD = 11.2), with 69.8% of the sample being male. Chi-squared tests of independence showed no significant effect of gender on the following variables: extrinsic motivation ($\chi^2 = 108.1$; $p = 0.320$), amotivation ($\chi^2 = 19.5$; $p = 0.814$), identified regulation motivation ($\chi^2 = 36.0$; $p = 0.374$), intrinsic motivation ($\chi^2 = 36.8$; $p = 0.258$), autonomy need satisfaction ($\chi^2 = 27.2$; $p = 0.561$), competence need satisfaction ($\chi^2 = 20.7$; $p = 0.474$), affiliation need satisfaction ($\chi^2 = 29.7$; $p = 0.479$), efficacy ($\chi^2 = 42.6$; $p = 0.443$), hope ($\chi^2 = 38.3$; $p = 0.633$), resilience ($\chi^2 = 49.8$; $p = 0.138$), optimism ($\chi^2 = 34.1$; $p = 0.803$), positive automatic thoughts ($\chi^2 = 68.1$; $p = 0.543$), negative automatic thoughts ($\chi^2 = 44.5$; $p = 0.760$), positive emotions ($\chi^2 = 72.5$; $p = 0.095$) and self-esteem ($\chi^2 = 53.5$; $p = 0.340$). We found differences only for vitality ($\chi^2 = 113.2$; $p < 0.05$).

Correlations

After conducting Pearson's correlation analysis, we found several significant correlations between variables (see Table 1 for details). Self-determined motivations (intrinsic, identified) are significantly and positively correlated with well-being variables ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.001$ to $r = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$). Psychological capital is also significantly and positively correlated with well-being ($r = 0.50$, $p < 0.001$ to $r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$).

Structural equation modeling

A path analysis was conducted incorporating all variables according to the theoretical framework (Figure 1), including their factor loadings and squared multiple correlations (R^2). Preliminary analysis of model fit highlighted the need to free some covariances between standard errors ($\chi^2/df = 3.250$; $p < 0.001$; root-mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.095 [90%CI: 0.083–0.108]; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.906; Tucker–Lewis's index (TLI) = 0.883; p close < 0.001; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.063). This adjustment was made because the identified covariances were between variables within the same factor. Specifically, they were between autonomy and relatedness for basic needs, efficacy and resilience for PsyCap, identified and extrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation; self-esteem with positive emotions, positive emotions with vitality and self-esteem with vitality for well-being.

Parameter estimations indicate good and standardized regression weights above 0.50 (Figure 1). All parameters are standardized with $p < 0.001$, except for extrinsic regulation (0.05; $p = 0.549$), the effect of motivation on well-being (-0.05 ; $p = 0.527$) and amotivation (which is significant but logically negative, under -0.50). Coefficients of determination (R^2) are good: motivation regulation accounted for 59% of the variance of basic needs satisfaction, psychological capital accounted for 30% and well-being accounted for a high 87% of the variance of the variables.

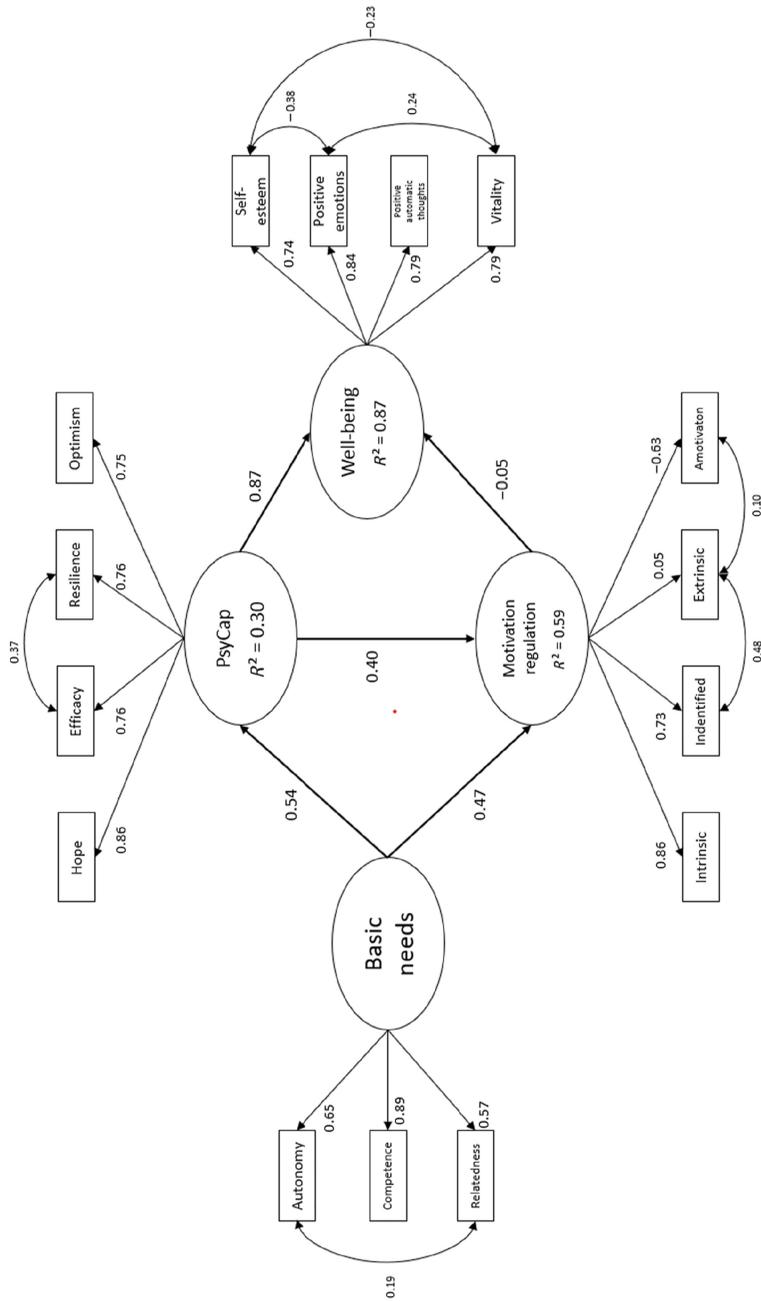
The model introduced in Figure 1 showed a good fit according to the following indices: $\chi^2/df = 1.942$; $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.062 [90%CI: 0.047–0.076]; CFI = 0.964; TLI = 0.951; p close = 0.097; SRMR = 0.048. The second confirmatory factorial analysis (CFA) showed an

Table 1.
Means, standard errors
and correlations of the
sample ($n = 250$)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. R-MAWS Intrinsic	5.69	1.18														
2. R-MAWS Identified	5.66	1.10	0.633**													
3. R-MAWS Extrinsic	3.99	1.09	0.061	0.362**												
4. R-MAWS	1.43	0.80	-0.536**	-0.457**	0.045											
Amotivation																
5. BPNWS Autonomy	5.11	0.94	0.458**	0.418**	-0.037	-0.381**										
6. BPNWS Competence	5.64	0.81	0.631**	0.575**	0.076	-0.607**	0.577**									
7. BPNWS Relatedness	5.14	0.81	0.406**	0.349**	0.039	-0.350**	0.486**	0.501**								
8. PCQ Hope	4.85	0.72	0.501**	0.411**	-0.018	-0.279**	0.319**	0.496**	0.454**							
9. PCQ Efficacy	5.05	0.84	0.437**	0.346**	-0.089	-0.262**	0.420**	0.507**	0.269**	0.674**						
10. PCQ Resilience	4.87	0.70	0.400**	0.272**	-0.094	-0.266**	0.378**	0.482**	0.254**	0.654**	0.740**					
11. PCQ Optimism	4.64	0.67	0.460**	0.373**	-0.100	-0.363**	0.468**	0.533**	0.391**	0.655**	0.538**	0.555**				
12. Self-Esteem	3.30	0.47	0.315**	0.200**	-0.150*	-0.291**	0.316**	0.515**	0.238**	0.571**	0.542**	0.571**	0.575**			
13. PANAS Positive	3.67	0.49	0.496**	0.392**	0.055	-0.276**	0.399**	0.540**	0.410**	0.682**	0.593**	0.608**	0.520**	0.484**		
14. ATQ Positive	3.74	0.63	0.463**	0.337**	-0.084	-0.238**	0.429**	0.519**	0.441**	0.625**	0.541**	0.539**	0.581**	0.579**	0.676**	
15. Vitality	5.23	0.87	0.564**	0.467**	0.061	-0.340**	0.470**	0.630**	0.443**	0.611**	0.557**	0.583**	0.500**	0.494**	0.745**	0.608**

Note(s): R-MAWS = Revised motivation at work scale; BPNWS = Basic psychological need at work scale; PCQ = Psychological Capital Questionnaire; PANAS = Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scale; ATQ = Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire; M = Means; SE = Standard Errors
** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$

We can be heroes at work



Source(s): Authors work

Figure 1. CFA of the model introducing basic needs satisfaction, PsyCap, Motivation regulation and well-being

acceptable model fit: $\chi^2/df = 1.942$; $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.062 [90%CI: 0.047–0.076]; CFI = 0.964; TLI = 0.951; pclose = 0.097; SRMR = 0.048.

The sample size is close to 200 participants; hence, the ratio between the chi-square test and the degrees of freedom is a pertinent index to evaluate model fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). A ratio below 2 is deemed good (Byrne, 1989), which is the case here ($\chi^2/df = 1.942$).

The RMSEA is a common measure of the goodness of fit of a model analyzed with SEM. An excellent RMSEA is below 0.050 and acceptable between 0.050 and 0.080, but it should never exceed 0.100 (Rigdon, 1996; Fabrigar *et al.*, 1999). In this study, RMSEA is less than 0.080 and relatively close to 0.050 (RMSEA = 0.062). It is particularly good considering the 90% confidence interval ([0.047–0.076]), indicating that it should not exceed 0.080. This is also confirmed when PClose(unilateral test of the null hypothesis if RMSEA = 0) is greater than 0.050, which is the case in this study (PClose = 0.097).

Metrics like the CFI and TLI are standard in assessing the quality of model fit. Both should exceed 0.900, and in this study, they register at 0.964 and 0.951, respectively. Lastly, the average standardized residual covariance, evaluated by the SRMR complements the evaluation of the RMSEA. A model exhibits a good fit if the SRMR is below 0.080 (Shi *et al.*, 2018), which is also the case in this study (SRMR = 0.048).

Based to these indices, we can conclude that the model demonstrates a good fit.

Discussion

Theoretical implications

The goal of this study was to demonstrate the linkage between motivation and the satisfaction of basic needs within the framework of SDT, psychological capital participation and the effects of these constructs on well-being during the Great Resignation. The results show that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs enables employees to build psychological capital resources and leads to more self-determined motivation. Elements such as basic needs satisfaction, PsyCap and motivation regulation underlie access to improved well-being, as reflected through metrics like self-esteem, positive emotions, positive automatic thoughts and vitality. Our study seeks to provide insight into the Great Resignation, framing it within the context of PsyCap and the theoretical bounds of SDT, and proposing effective and actionable solutions. The theoretical frameworks of SDT and PsyCap offer broad scientific insights, shedding light on key levers for spurring and sustaining engagement.

The results showed a strong link between the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, self-determination, PsyCap and psychological well-being. In the context of the Great Resignation, maintaining engagement requires taking these aspects into consideration to improve individual and organizational potential (Serenko, 2022). These psychological resources help combat the adversity caused by the post-pandemic context. The results particularly highlight the contribution of PsyCap as a cornerstone of this virtuous circle. Indeed, targeting PsyCap allows for better alignment of solutions proposed by companies, especially managers, in addition to more effectively improving the quality of life and working conditions of workers. Lastly, a culture of self-improvement offers possibilities that can emerge at a national level. If workers perceive the company as a place of solutions and possibilities rather than external problems caused by the Great Resignation, performance and well-being will only be enhanced (Ellera *et al.*, 2023).

A significant aspect of this study lies in the observation of numerous dimensions positively related with psychological well-being. The objective was to understand how employee well-being is influenced by individual factors (e.g. PsyCap, motivation at workplace) and how these are, in turn, shaped by the supportiveness of the work organization context (e.g. satisfaction of basic needs). Therefore, we chose variables that are

consistently associated with psychological well-being in various studies and are also operationalized in the SDT (Deci *et al.*, 2017).

The high correlations and the robust model fit suggest that established and validated theory such as SDT, paired with a more recent but compelling theory such as PsyCap, can reveal intriguing interconnections. While it is recognized that managers should promote a work environment that champions autonomy and self-determination, many are unsure of the exact methods encourage such attributes. PsyCap offers a credible call to action, given that its components are easily teachable and comprehensible by collaborators. According to this study, promoting the ways and means to achieve autonomy, competence and relatedness can help individuals in developing PsyCap resources such as hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism.

Practical implications

Hope is fascinating as a construct, exhibiting highly positive and significant correlations with several variables, notably those related to well-being. If we delve into the reasons why people quit their jobs, especially during the Great Resignation (Jiskrova, 2022; Serenko, 2022), a common sentiment is the desire to focus on their future. Hope stands as a valuable resource, helping people find their ways and offering them the agency to pursue their life goals. Managers could focus on this construct to enhance employee well-being, by setting exciting goals, securing for their employees the agency and resources to achieve them, and prompting colleagues to cheer them on (Lopez, 2013). Hope therefore naturally aligns with self-determined behaviors, enabling people to effectively navigate progress towards their objectives. This example underscores the intertwined nature of hope and motivation, positioning SDT and PsyCap as complementary facets of the same narrative.

Many studies have highlighted the impact of basic needs fulfillment on well-being (Ryan *et al.*, 2008). However, many managers grapple with adopting an autonomy-supportive stance. They must acknowledge employees' viewpoints, offer greater choice, understand that rewards and sanctions are often counterproductive, learn how to provide more positive feedback, and understand how communication styles can affect motivation, performance and well-being (Hardré and Reeve, 2009; Deci *et al.*, 2017). This study shows that the satisfaction of basic needs affects both psychological capital and motivation regulation. Hence, managerial styles, such as the transformational leadership popularized by Bass (1985), that empowers followers through charisma, inspiration, stimulation and problem-solving (Bass, 1999; Deci *et al.*, 2017), become pivotal. Enhancing this style with psychological capital training can furnish people with more internal resources for self-determination.

Building on the notion that this model of motivational resources integrated with PsyCap can aid individuals in decision-making, possessing a robust set of psychological resources has been associated with effectively managing adversity (Luthans *et al.*, 2015). It also enhances the ability to develop self-regulatory behaviors (see the authentic leadership development model of Luthans and Avolio, 2003). This capacity to cope with problems could be central to addressing the unanticipated problems cited as reasons for the Great Resignation (Serenko, 2022). Notably, this study highlighted the effect of self-determined motivation, psychological capital and basic psychological needs on well-being. As such, these elements should be considered a perfect context for finding solutions and elaborating strategies to move forward. An enlightened mind, supported by the ability of set clear goals and the resources to achieve them, stands to maximize the cognitive resources obtained from PsyCap.

The model supported in this study also warns against the depletion of motivational resources, which adversely affects well-being, leading to outcomes like emotional exhaustion (Kammeyer-Mueller *et al.*, 2016), lower self-control (Muraven and Slessareva, 2003), and diminished engagement (Petrova *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, managers need to facilitate

opportunities for employees to build these resources, be it through managerial techniques or tools designed to build these motivational resources. Moreover, if a manager observes that their team is not motivated, leveraging psychological capital emerges as a potent strategy to bolster self-determination and enhance overall well-being. Quality of life at work remains a nuanced, multifactorial concept, encompassing a number of theories centered on the interaction between an individual and their environment (Najafi Tavani *et al.*, 2013). While the key to solving the Great Resignation may come from an evolution in management, it could just as well take the form of individuals building the resources to combat adversity. This study showed that the problem is twofold: the need for a more integrative and comprehensive management fostering an environment of self-determination, and the need for possibilities to assess the quantified self (Swan, 2013). A better knowledge of individual resources is mandatory to help people know themselves at a time of Great Resignation (Kuzior *et al.*, 2022). Innovative approaches are needed to discern shifts in individual priorities and equip people to overcome adversity. The framework built around motivation and psychological capital marks a move towards this objective. Subsequent research in this area should aim to further enhance our understanding of motivation at work in our present troubled times.

In line with recommendations from the literature (Formica and Sfodera, 2022; Jiskrova, 2022; Serenko, 2022), companies must recognize the inherent human value of their workforce. The cost of the Great Resignation is substantial, and support for employees should commence from their very first day within the organization. Given that the results show significant effects of psychological capital on motivation, the psychological resources of individuals are critical and must be nurtured starting from the onboarding process. Common reasons for employee departures often revolve around a disconnection with the company's purpose or a lack of professional fulfillment and meaningfulness of work (Han, 2015; Formica and Sfodera, 2022). As inferred from this study, maintaining psychological capital is a crucial factor to consider in ensuring motivation and ensuring a good fit between the employee and the company. These insights are congruent with findings that show the profound impact of satisfying psychological needs. To truly foster self-motivation and promote optimal psychological well-being (Deci *et al.*, 2017), organizations must evaluate through the prism of these essential needs. In practical terms, managers need to ask themselves, "Do my employees feel a sense of affiliation? Do they have the opportunity to accomplish tasks on their own? Do they feel competent in what they do?" Asking such questions can pave the way for meaningful dialog on genuine engagement and aligning with the core values of employees, which in turn enhances their commitment (Ayachit and Chitta, 2022).

In the workplace, it is important to consider each worker's motivation and understand their individual characteristics in specific contexts. Many companies were caught off guard by the Great Resignation, as they were not specifically focused on adapting to individual contexts. Managers should undergo training to understand how motivation works and how to bring about a work environment that helps employees build psychological resources such as PsyCap. The massive rise in quantified self-data, which can be used to assess motivation, presents an opportunity for companies to develop tailored learning pathways aimed at improving overall well-being (Swan, 2013). This resource-building endeavor will help people brave adversity and anticipate contexts that could reduce the quantity of available cognitive resources. Exploring and building internal resources within the framework of SDT can help individuals find meaning in their work. They can, in turn, significantly benefit from the internalization of behaviors spurred on by a deeper understanding of their environment. Implementing these practical implications necessitates a profound shift in habits, rooted in different methods of communication. In the context of the Great Resignation, values and the meaning attributed to work have become important and cannot be overlooked (Linzer *et al.*, 2022). The findings provide a starting point to sustaining the virtuous circle of motivation and well-being by leveraging PsyCap.

Thanks to the establishment of a model associating motivation, PsyCap and psychological well-being within the framework of the Great Resignation, we propose solutions for individuals as well as for managers. Consequently, the theoretical and practical contributions include this study in the research area of organizational behavior and human resource management, as well as in the strategic possibilities of management. Future research could focus on testing the proposed solutions within the framework of the model proposed in this study.

Limitations and future directions

This study presents some limitations. The data collected were cross-sectional, and the study could benefit from a longitudinal data collection approach to ascertain the impact of variables on performance at work more accurately. Consequently, the causal relationship between well-being and performance has not been investigated. We chose to assess well-being with measures that were already associated with the concept. Another limitation lies in the demographic composition of the sample used; all participants were French, residing and working in France. We acknowledge that the work context varies across countries, exemplified by the differences between France and the US. In France, individuals have more opportunities to transition to another job, partly due to the lower costs of education and training, unlike in the US where the Great Resignation phenomenon has been more pronounced. Therefore, the findings of this study are mainly applicable to organization contexts in France. It could be worthwhile to replicate this study in other contexts to explore any intercultural variances. Future research should also focus on implementing a plan to build and sustain psychological resources related to PsyCap.

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