Psychological Ownership: Journey of Past towards a Promising Future...

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ABSTRACT

Psychological ownership (PO), a relatively new construct in the domain of positive psychology, is still in its nascent stage. A clearer understanding of what is known about PO and what still needs to be explored, would provide a more focussed direction for future research initiatives in this direction. This study reviews papers published between 2001 and 2017 that fulfilled the criteria of being qualitative and/or quantitative studies on PO. An inductive review of the studies helped the researchers to unravel a model of (a) antecedents to PO which describes the factors affecting PO, (b) intervening role played by PO, (c) an outcome of PO, and (d) distinguishing nature of PO making it stand apart from other related constructs. Towards the end, based on the review, directions for future research have been proposed for a greater understanding of the relationship between PO and other constructs, especially in the organizational context can be attained. Specifically, the present work presents a platform for the expansion of an inclusive theory of PO and concrete underpinning for empirical testing. This systematic review would help in understanding how organizations can benefit from psychological ownership since such a feeling would inculcate responsibility and stewardship amongst employees.

1. Introduction

Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000) asserted that psychology was not delivering enough “knowledge of what makes life worth living” (p. 5). In their opinion, psychology had added much to our understanding about racism, violence, self esteem management, depression, and growing up under adverse circumstances but at the cost of remaining silent or dormant about character strengths, virtues, civility and conditions encouraging high levels of happiness. However, the scale turned sharply and in just 5 years the movement of positive psychology gained momentum by dominating the themes of numerous conferences and handbooks (example, Schmuck & Sheldon, 2001; Snyder & Lopez, 2002; Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Keyes & Haidt, 2003; Lopez & Snyder, 2003; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Positive psychology involves study of situations and processes contributing towards the development or optimal functioning of people, group and institutions. In this regard, many constructs of positive psychology have been deeply explored, such as, hope, optimism, self – efficacy, mindfulness, civility, etc.

One construct in positive psychology, ‘psychological ownership’, has increasingly captured the attention of scholars and practitioners as a prospective predictor of employees’ behaviour and attitudes (Peters, 1988; Brown, 1989; Pierce, Rubenfeld, & Morgan, 1991; VandeWalle, Van Dyne, & Kostova, 1995; Dirks, Cummings, & Pierce, 1996; Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001). Psychological ownership, the feeling that a particular object is ‘mine’, is a psychologically experienced phenomena wherein employee nurtures and exhibits possessive feelings for an object or a target. In the area of management, scholars have examined the role of formal organizational ownership arrangements (like, employee stock option plans, cooperative plans, etc) and psychological ownership (Dirks et al., 1996; Pendleton, Wilson, & Wright, 1998; Pierce, Pierce et al., 2001; Rubenfeld & Morgan, 1991) to unravel the hidden layers of employees’ behaviour in organizational settings.

PO produces a psychological contract which intensifies the relation between organization and employees; making employees readily accept extra – role behaviours contributing to organizational performance (Rousseau, 1989). Psychological ownership develops a cordial bond between employers and employees since the psychological perception formed by employees motivates them to display positive attitudes and behaviours in the work place. Employees’ feelings of possession towards the organization, which is “common values”, as well as the connection of similarity and partnership branching from this feeling may provide for development of ‘organizational commitment’. In such an organizational culture, employees expect each other to work with solidarity and over a period of time, these expectations form normative rules and limits. Thus, psychological ownership builds up moral values and mutual rights and liabilities, paving the way for ‘organizational citizenship behaviours’.

Even though psychological ownership’s relationship with other work related constructs should be studied but equal emphasis should be laid on acknowledging its fundamentally different conceptual base to appreciate its distinctive explanatory power. In the present work an endeavour is made by the researchers to identify the uniqueness inherent in the construct of psychological ownership that will help in viewing it in isolation. This will augment our understanding of employees’ work behaviour and attitude, by elucidating variation over and above already established constructs (like, job satisfaction, job involvement, psychological empowerment, organizational commitment, etc).
2. Objective of the Study

To present a framework of psychological ownership and establish its significant influence on various aspects of organizational functioning by conducting a systematic review of the literature published from 2001-2017.

3. Research Methodology

At the very outset, the paper aims to explore the literature related to psychological ownership to gain an understanding of the concept, its dimensions and its antecedents. Secondly, it focuses on the distinctive nature of psychological ownership in comparison to other work related attitudes. Thirdly, it aims to collect all the work carried from 2001 to 2017 in relation to psychological ownership so that the various role played by it in organizational context can help in justifying its significance.

For the present work, the systematic approach necessitated extensive searches of relevant management and positive psychology databases. These were JSTOR, EBSCOhost, Proquest, InterScience, Questa Online and Sage. These databases have been extensively used by researchers as they contain comprehensive data from accredited national and international multidisciplinary journals that concentrate on Organizational Behaviour, Positive Psychology, Human resource management, Social, personal and applied behavioural psychology and general management – the disciplines within which the selected construct resides. Manual searches and internet searches were conducted to identify relevant secondary references and publications for presenting a comprehensive framework of the multi dimensional construct, ‘psychological ownership’.

The collected research articles were evaluated by the authors in terms of:
- Objective(s) of the studies
- Approach employed – qualitative or quantitative
- Methods utilized for collecting data
- Their concrete findings

The common themes from the solicited data were identified to achieve the stated objectives.

4. Literature Review

Ownership feelings can be directed towards material as well as immaterial objects, and help to form identity (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992) and influence behaviour (Issacs, 1933; O’Toole, 1979). An absence of any legal or formal claim of ownership can also give rise to such feelings of ownership. A mere association with an object is sufficient enough to give rise to ownership feelings (Beggan & Brown, 1994). The concept of psychological ownership captures these very basic characteristics of possession. Psychological ownership describes the employees’ subjective interpretations and evaluations of their deals with the organization (Rousseau, 1996; 2001; Turnley & Feldman, 1998). Pierce, Kostova & Dirks (2001) define psychological ownership as a “state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership (material or immaterial in nature) or a piece of it is theirs (It is MINE!)”. It is a psychologically experienced phenomenon through which a person develops possessive feelings for the “target” (Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004). The word ‘target’ encompasses a wide range of “objects of psychological attachment”, such as an organization being served, a set of technologies and tools used by someone, ideas or designs developed by someone (Avey, Avolio, Crossley & Luthans, 2009).

Pierce et al. 2003 stated that psychological ownership has many facets – it includes a cognitive and affective aspect. The employees’ awareness, thoughts and beliefs about the targets of ownership form the cognitive aspect. Affectively, ownership feelings generate pleasure and provide the owners feeling of competence and efficacy. Thus, we can say that psychological ownership of organizations consists, in part, of emotional attachments to them, which surpasses simple cognitive valuation of organizations.

5. Psychological Ownership and other Constructs

The existence of a number of constructs in the domain of organizational behaviour theory focussing on psychological relationships developed by employees, have raised questions...
about the distinctive character of the construct of ‘psychological ownership’ (Pierce, et. al, 2001). Pierce et al. (2001) theorized that possessiveness and motivational bases, psychological ownership can be differentiated from other constructs. They stated that psychological ownership helps in satisfying three basic human needs; home (having a sense of place), efficacy and effectance, and self – identity. These basic needs are satisfied when employees experience feelings of psychological ownership.

The first basic need is to have a ‘place or home’; that is a sense of belonging. Possessions captured metaphorically by ‘home’ offer human beings with a sense of place (Arndrey, 1996; Duncan, 1981 & Porteous, 1976). Citing the views of the philosopher, Simone Weil (1952, pg. 41), having a place satisfies a prominent need of the human soul since the soul ‘feels isolated, lost, if it is not surrounded by objects which seem to it like an extension of the bodily members’ (p. 33). The need ‘home’ doesn’t confine to a plot of land surrounded by four walls; it can also extend to a compound, village or neighbourhood (Porteous, 1976). Home triggers a sense that this space belongs to me which in turn supplies a context for comfort, security and pleasure (Heidegger, 1967).

A general human need to feel competent or capable in particular fields indicates the feeling of efficacious (Bandura, 1977). On the other hand, the need to feel competent while interacting with others in a social setting is referred as ‘effectance motivation’ (White, 1959). Specifically, possessions provide feelings of control and power to cast influence on both intangible and tangible objects (Pierce, O’Driscoll, & Coghlan, 2004).

The third need is self – identity which symbolizes the need to form a clear sense of self (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). Possessions are viewed as figurative expressions of the self, depicting core values or individuality (Abelson & Prentice, 1989; Dittmar, 1992; Porteous, 1976). Possessions and a feeling that this object is ‘mine’ help people know the self.

Morrow (1983) argued that to avoid construct proliferation it is vital to draw differences between psychological ownership and other work – related attitudes (like job involvement, job satisfaction, psychological empowerment, organizational identification, organizational commitment and internalisation). The present study makes an attempt to identify lines of differences among psychological ownership and aforesaid work – related attitudes to highlight the due importance of the selected construct. In order to identify the distinctive nature of psychological ownership, in relation to the stated work – related attitudes and behaviours, let us focus on the fundamental question addressed by each of these constructs. In organizational context, psychological ownership questions ‘How much do I feel this workplace is mine?’ Job involvement asks ‘How important is the job and job performance to my self – image?’ (Lawler & Hall, 1970); Job satisfaction asks ‘What evaluative judgments do I make about my job?’ (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996); Psychological empowerment raises the question ‘Do I feel capable and intrinsically motivated in my work role?’ (Spreitzer, 1995); Organizational identification asks ‘Who am I?’ (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquall, 1994; Mael & Tetrick, 1992; Pratt, 1998); Organizational commitment questions ‘Why should I maintain my membership in this organization?’ (Meyer & Allen, 1997) and Organizational internalisation asks ‘What do I believe?’ (O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986).

6. Emergence of Psychological Ownership

Varieties of factors influence the materialization of psychological ownership. The potential for developing psychological ownership lies in both targets and employees and situational factors influence its appearance and expression.

1.1 Target Factors

Targets must attract and be visible to employees so as to capture their attention and interest (Pierce et al., 2001). In addition, targets must also possess the characteristics that realize the purposes for efficacy, self identity and / or the need for a home or place. Organizations, on timely basis, could disclose their goals and prospects in meetings, newsletters, on notice boards, display their mission statements at workplaces and discuss it regularly with employees. This will help the employees to track their achievements and feel that their organizations recognize and appreciate them.

1.2 Individual Factors

The strength of the motives varies over time (Pierce, Kostova & Dirks, 2003). Personality also has a role to play in this. Personality traits influence how employees express motives in their behaviour (Winter, Steward, Klohen & Duncan, 1998).

1.3 Process Factors

These include the factors of ‘roots’, the ‘routes’, target factors and individual factors which through their complex interaction give rise to psychological ownership. Efficacy and effectance, identity and having a home - the three roots of psychological ownership depend to some extent on each other. The result of any one or any subset of, these needs may give rise to ownership (Pierce et al, 2003). In a similar manner, the three routes to psychological ownership (intimate knowledge, control and self – investment) are distinct, complementary and additive. Any single route may give rise to ownership feelings that work in autonomous manner.

1.4 Contextual Factors

Contextual factors like norms, rules, laws, organizational hierarchies, might support or hinder employees from developing ownership feelings along with the organizational culture cast a significant influence on the construct of psychological ownership.

7. Research on Psychological Ownership

All the articles / work conducted during the period of 2001 – 2017 in relation to psychological ownership have been collected. To present it systematically, the information from the articles is tabulated and divided into three parts:

1. Information from the articles explaining the concept of psychological ownership
2. Articles identify the antecedents of psychological ownership

3. Articles discovering the consequences or outcomes of psychological ownership in an organizational context.

Table 2: Conceptualization of Psychological Ownership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)/Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Method(s)</th>
<th>Key Finding(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pierce, J.L.,</td>
<td>Toward a theory of psychological ownership in organizations</td>
<td>Academy of Management Review, Vol. 26, pp. 298-310.</td>
<td>*Define psychological ownership *Identify its routes and motives (roots) through which it develops *Determine the grounds on which psychological ownership differs from other related constructs</td>
<td>*Qualitative *Literature Review</td>
<td>* Psychological ownership is defined as a state in which employees feel that the target of ownership is ‘his or hers’. * It’s ‘roots’ are self identity, efficacy and effectance, and having a sense of place or home; while it’s ‘routes’ are intimate knowledge of targets, to control targets and investing the self in targets. * It is distinct from organizational commitment, identification and internalisation.</td>
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<td>Kostova, T.,</td>
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<td>Ashkanasy, N.M.,</td>
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<td>Bramble, T.,</td>
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<td>Avolio, B.J.,</td>
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<td>Crossley, C.D.,</td>
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<td>Kuruppuge, R.</td>
<td>The Power of Psychological Ownership in the longevity of Family</td>
<td>Journal of Innovation Management in Small &amp; Medium Enterprises, Vol. 2017(2017),</td>
<td>To understand the behaviour of family managers having kinship to owners without possessing legal ownership rights over the business.</td>
<td>Qualitative research on 12 family owned private businesses operating in Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Self – identity acts as one of the most important motivational factor for these managers.</td>
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<td>Gregar, Ales</td>
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8. Antecedents of Psychological Ownership

People tend to experience the feelings of psychological ownership in all parts of their lives, even in the absence of any economic, legal or physical attachment (Furby, 1978; Dittmar, 1992). Prior studies have identified that autonomy and effective organizational participation has stronger impact on psychological ownership feelings as compared to legal possession tools, like, employee partnership and share holding (Pendleton, Wilson & Wright, 1998). Individual factors such as statuses and roles, service period, age, gender, personality, etc. might influence the feelings of psychological ownership (Pierce, Kostova & Dirks, 2003). People with Machiavellianism trait and efficacious people exercising power and control show an inclination towards objects that provide power and control; extroverts applying their social contacts select objects that augment their social contacts; introverts having a dominant perception of self – identity tend to favour objects that assist them in fulfilling their inner goals by employing their self – investment. Females show disposition towards symbolic objects which may facilitate their self expression; while males select objects giving control and worth using physical activity.

Acknowledging the significance of ownership and it’s behaviour in self expression and self – realization makes us arrive at an assertion that individual values as well as cultural values effects the targets and means of ownership behaviours.

Pierce, O’Driscoll & Coghlan (2004) examined that experienced control mediates the relationship between three sources of work environment structure, namely, autonomy, technology, and participative decision making– and psychological ownership of the job and the organization, though on a minor level. In an empirical study conducted by Olzer, Yilmaz & Ozler (2008) it was observed that feelings of psychological ownership were strengthen on account of job satisfaction and a participative organizational climate; also, psychological ownership was influenced by employees’ length of service in the current organization. Han, Chiang & Chiang (2013) made an empirically observation that person-organization fit was positively but not significantly related to psychological ownership. Bambale (2013) states that servant leadership encourages employees to consider the organization they work as their “own” paving way for positive work outcomes.

Table 3: Antecedents of Psychological Ownership

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<th>Author(s)/Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Method(s)</th>
<th>Key Finding(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Olzer, H., Yilmaz,</td>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Problems and</td>
<td>*To study whether</td>
<td>*Quantitative</td>
<td>*Job satisfaction &amp; a</td>
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A. & Ozler, A. (2008) | ownership: An empirical study on its antecedents and impacts upon organizational behaviours. | Perspectives in Management, Vol. 6(3), pp. 38–47. | job satisfaction, organizational climate, tenure & demographic factors influence ownership. • To study the level of impact of psychological ownership on organizational commitment & OCB. | *Questionnaires | participative organizational climate augment ownership feelings of employees. *Ownership feeling is determined by the amount of years employee worked in organizations. • Psychological ownership strengthens organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviours. |


Han, Tzu-Shian, Chiang, Hsu-Hein & Chiang, Chia-Ling (2013) | The Investigation of the Relation between Person – Organization Fit, Person – job Fit, Psychological Ownership & Contextual Performance: A Longitudinal Approach | Journal of Organizational Behaviour, Vol. 24, pp. 473-490. | *To propose a research framework focusing on the relationships between person – organization fit, person – job fit, psychological ownership and organizational performance. | *Quantitative *Questionnaires | *Person-job fit was significantly related to psychological ownership, and psychological ownership was significantly related to contextual performance. *Person-organization fit was positively but not significantly related to psychological ownership. |


9. Consequences of Psychological Ownership

Previous research has established a positive relationship between ownership of employees and organizational performance (Rosen & Quarrey, 1987; Wagner & Rosen, 1985). Meyer & Allen (1991) states that psychological ownership relates to organizational behaviour. Druskat & Pescosolido (2002) consider psychological ownership as a concept that focuses on sharing and making organizational members feel as organizational owners. This ownership feeling, in turn, encourages feelings of authority and responsibility making individuals share values and beliefs, which ultimately brings benefits to organizations (Wagner, Parker & Christiansen, 2003). The feeling of psychological ownership produces a psychological contract which intensifies the relation between organization and employees; making employees more prepared to put across extra – role behaviours contributing to organizational performance (Rousseau, 1989). Psychological feeling is based on the sense of identification which employees nurture toward their organization and this in turn, produces a sense of belongingness among employees who aspire to become organizational insiders (O’ Driscoll, Pierce & Coghlan, 2006).

Dyne & Pierce (2004) examined the relationship between psychological ownership and work behaviours (performance and organizational citizenship) and employees’ attitudes (organizational commitment, job satisfaction & OBSE) by testing hypothesis on the data collected from over 800 employees. Psychological ownership leads to job satisfaction & organizational commitment and mediates the relationship between autonomy and these work attitudes (Mayhew, M.G., Ashkanasy, N.M., Bramble, T., & Gardner, J., 2007). Olzer, Yilmaz & Ozler (2008) concluded that psychological ownership strengthens organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviours among employees. Jeswani & Dave (2011) presented a conceptual framework to study the
relationship between promotion focused and preventative focused factors of psychological ownership and turnover intentions of faculty of technical education institutes of India. Olckers & Plessis (2012) conducted a conceptual study to identify the positive role psychological ownership can play in retaining talent in organizations. Iona Buchem (2012) empirically explored the role of ownership feelings and control in use of technology – enhanced learning environments. Psychological ownership acts as full mediator between workplace trust and turnover intent (Olckers, C. & Enslin, Claire, 2016).

<table>
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<th>TABLE 4: Consequences of Psychological Ownership</th>
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<td><strong>Author (s)/Year</strong></td>
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<td>Dyne &amp; Pierce (2004)</td>
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To investigate the relationship between workplace trust, psychological ownership & turnover intentions of professionals in South African services organization. Cross-sectional quantitative survey design of 302 professionals, SEM

Psychological ownership positively relates to workplace trust and negatively relates to turnover intent. Psychological ownership acts as full mediator between workplace trust and turnover intent.

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**Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Psychological Ownership with its relationship with other Organizational Constructs**

**Source: Authors’ own**

**Table 5: Scales of Psychological Ownership**

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<th>Author (s) Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Items (Number &amp; Dimensions)</th>
<th>Publications</th>
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**10. Research Implications**

In the present study, an endeavour has been made by the researchers to discuss the implications of psychological ownership in organizational context. Psychological ownership establishes a tight bond between organization and employees and supports their loyalty and faith. When employees are psychologically satisfied, it may result in a better association between employers and employees; therefore, the area of concern of HR practices is to augment employees’ psychological ownership. The current research would help the organizations to organize suitable interventions aiming at generating and strengthening the psychological ownership feelings among employees. Specifically, it would assist the HR practitioners in framing the appropriate practices that may influence and solidify the feelings of psychological ownership among employees. Means to enhance employees’ psychological ownership towards their workplace or organization, at large, will in future serve as a significant point of focus of strategic human resource management. In addition, the antecedents would provide guidance to the organizations to work towards establishing an appropriate culture supporting feelings of psychological ownership among employees so that its numerous benefits can be reaped by the organization. Armed with psychological ownership, employees may perceive their job-related endeavours as part of self extension. They may be more enthusiastic to willingly connect with the organization and maintain a relationship of high performance.

As an integrated multidimensional construct, psychological ownership can usher numerous benefits in an organizational working. It nurtures a feeling of stewardship and responsibility...
Towards tasks, processes or organizations as a whole among employees. Also, psychological ownership helps an organization to retain talent and influences the turnover intentions of skilled employees to stay with their current organizations. Pierce, Rubenfeld & Morgan (1991) observed that plans of employee ownership, wherein employees feel as owners, generate positive psychological, social and behavioural consequences. Pierce, O’Dristol & Coghlan (2004) asserted that ownership, as a personal attitude, forms an association between individual and the organization and influences employees’ decisions in facilitating or resisting implementation of organizational changes. Pierce & Rodgers (2004) emphasized that ownership helps in developing acceptance and positivity towards change, feelings of stewardship, responsibility, self-sacrifice, motivation and citizenship. Dyne & Pierce (2004) have identified a strong association between psychological ownership and organizational citizenship, work attitude and organizational performance.

Undoubtedly, psychological ownership is a significant construct that has the potential to widen and enrich the existing knowledge about other work-related attitudes and concepts of organizational behaviour.

11. Conclusion and Future Directions

In the present work, researchers have laid down a theoretical framework to identify the antecedents as well as the outcomes of psychological ownership in an organizational context. The tentative linkages identified in the presented framework may be empirically tested for giving a concrete shape to the relationships stated. The competitive forces driving the business environment necessitate the development of an instrument that would assist organizations to gauge how employees infer their psychological ownership link with their organizations and the extent of benefits stemming from such an ownership. Such an instrument should help the organizations in acknowledging the extent to which employees feel as owners of the organization, whether they (that is employees) exhibit sense of responsibility and exercise control over their work environment, as well as whether they identify themselves with their organizations. Comparative culture studies clearly indicate that different cultures have diverse approach and meaning assigned towards their job and work and these differences may have significant influence on roots of the motives establishing feelings of psychological ownership among employees. Moreover, a study comparing the approach of employees towards psychological ownership across different generations (such as, generation Z employees vis-à-vis their earlier counterparts) could help in revealing possible differentiating factors. Future work may conduct a longitudinal study with a view to identify cause – and – effect relationship among variables or may examine the relationship between adaptive performance of employees and psychological ownership; thus, providing fresh insights into the conceptualization of the construct of psychological ownership.

References


