

# The Impact of Psychological Capital, Knowledge Sharing, and Autonomous Motivation on College Students' Innovative Behavior

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#### Abstract

Despite decades of reform efforts and China's large population, there is still a gap in the talent market between supply and demand, which affects Chinese college students' training plans. Although higher education continues to reform, the market's criteria for selecting talents are more comprehensive and no longer academic-based. Despite a severe employment background, employment standards continue to improve, and innovative behavior has become one of the evaluation criteria. Currently, the majority of innovation and entrepreneurship courses that stimulate students' innovative behavior come from external sources, overlooking their intrinsic motivation. Psychological capital can provide positive psychological resources to students, such as resilience, thereby improving their awareness and promoting behavior. We must be aware of the impact of intrinsic motivation on students, and we must use psychological capital and knowledge sharing to strengthen intrinsic motivation, promote innovative behavior, and build an influence model. This essay will look at how psychological capital can be used to encourage students to be creative in Chinese schools. It will also explain how to change things by combining knowledge sharing and intrinsic motivation in a more complete way. Researchers will investigate how to use and expand psychological capital theory in the Chinese context to support college students' innovative behavior.

**Keywords:** Psychological Capital, Knowledge Sharing, Autonomous Motivation, Innovative Behavior, Higher Education

# Introduction

Research on psychological capital began in the early 21st century, originating from positive psychology, and is a relatively new concept. Luthans & Yaoussef-Morgan (2017), divide psychological capital into four dimensions: hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Individuals begin with psychological capital, then apply in-depth research to the group and enterprise levels. There is a positive relationship between psychological capital and improving organizational performance, such as by eliminating job burnout and improving employees' innovative behavior. In many environments today, including schools, psychological capital

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plays a crucial role in enhancing students' academic performance and intrinsic motivation (Siu, Bakker, & Jiang, 2014). Although the venue has grown larger, the goal of psychological capital has remained the same. The intention remains to foster individuals' psychological development. However, there is a dearth of research in the areas of implementation intervention and cross-cultural research, primarily focusing on management applications within corporate organizations.

Most of the interventions in the school environment are also used to improve the motivation and mental health of college students, such as predicting mental health (Selvaraj, 2015), improving academic achievement, etc. In this case, psychological capital is considered a positive psychological state (Luthans & Youssef, 2004).

According to estimates, the number of fresh graduates in China will reach 11.58 million in 2023, with a 5.82 million difference between the number of new jobs and the number of fresh graduates, indicating either a lack of desire to work or a lack of jobs available that year. The difference between supply and demand has caused some people to transition to independent jobs, such as entrepreneurship, freelance food delivery, etc., while others continue to study for higher education. This has also caused the educational threshold of the job market to rise.

In this situation, to have the confidence to face the future, college students must improve their competitiveness. Innovative behavior can improve students' problem-solving abilities and creative thinking as an important aspect (He, Yang, Han et al., 2021). According to Kim et al. (2018), it is crucial for students in universities to demonstrate their cognitive abilities through their behavior when presented with new opportunities. Researchers identified innovation behavior as a key parameter that partially mediated the relationship between problem-solving ability and innovation behavior. Human resources has extensively studied and used psychological capital, an important component of positive organizational psychology. Many studies have confirmed that it can promote innovative behavior among corporate employees. In innovative situations, self-efficacy is the key to innovation adoption. Necessary conditions (Zhang, 2023): Zhang identified intrinsic motivation as the prototypical form of autonomous motivation, which reflects motives for engaging in behavior due to the inherent interest and satisfaction derived from the action itself. Intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy work together to promote innovative behavior (Wang et al., 2021).

Scholars have begun to explore the expansion of psychological capital and the focus on individuals, but psychological capital can also have a positive impact on groups (Harty et al., 2016). Universities are the institutions with the fastest circulation of knowledge in society. Teamwork is conducive to innovation. Information flow among members can promote innovation. Improvement in psychological capital leads to an increase in the willingness to share knowledge. Knowledge-sharing culture's moderating role as an innovation factor: This is a meta-level factor that buffers the harmful effects of technological stress on self-efficacy and innovation resistance. Organizations should encourage a culture of technical knowledge sharing to mitigate the negative effects of technological pressure on self-efficacy and innovation resistance (Zhang, 2023), although the precise mechanism of knowledge sharing's impact remains unclear.

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Society and schools provide many courses, lectures, and clubs that cultivate students' innovative thinking and behavior. At present, most of the things that college students face are still carried out under the school's arrangement rather than independently. This article aims to transform passivity into initiative by promoting autonomous motivation for research. Innovation requires facing many unknowns. Simultaneously, research questions revolve around college students' behavior and ability towards innovative behaviors, including whether they can overcome these challenges, whether they possess the confidence to do so, and their attitudes towards these innovative behaviors. These characteristics prompt the introduction of the psychological capital theory, which explores the four dimensions of hope, self, resilience, and positivity. Information flows between student groups, determining their ability to effectively enhance their own or others' knowledge, promote knowledge transformation, and accelerate the innovation process. This article introduces knowledge sharing as a mediating variable for further research. We will share concepts and applications of psychological capital, intrinsic motivation, and knowledge sharing in the process of studying students' innovative behavior.

### **Positionality Statement**

Based on research interests in the psychological state of college students and improving behavioral performance, the author of this paper writes from an interdisciplinary perspective, starting with background and expertise in the fields of psychology and education. This article's author examines this topic from the perspective of a university teacher. During her first year of teaching, she discovered a close relationship between personal traits and psychological states and the differences in student behavior, prompting her to consider whether she could influence low-level students through intervention. She has contemplated the possibility of influencing low-level students through intervention. She has personally witnessed the potential of psychological capital in enhancing students' daily lives and personal abilities. In her research, she uses psychological capital as a tool to maintain a positive level of activity among her classmates. Her interest stems from the sharing of information, discovered during work that some students deliberately concealed information in order to improve their competitiveness in order to obtain honors or bonuses. Her personal experience discovering that some people prefer to hide their knowledge or refuse to share information. She also explore the use of psychological capital to regulate students' psychological state and promote students' positive psychology and behavior, personality traits and psychological capital in psychology to enhance teaching methods, improve student status, foster the development of students' abilities, and raise awareness in education.

# **Innovative Behavior of College Students in Chinese Culture**

Geert Hofstede (2001), a famous Dutch psychologist and management scientist, analyzed cultural differences between countries in six dimensions: power distance, tolerance for uncertainties, avoidance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, long-term-short-term, and indulgence-restraint. We will select three dimensions from the above dimensions of national culture to briefly analyze the psychological characteristics of Chinese students (Hofstede, Gert, & Michael, 2010). In the dimension of "power distance," higher vocational students show obvious dependence on authority. "Power distance" describes how important an organization's status, prestige, and level in the hierarchy are, as well as how sensitive, dependent, and worshipful people are to authority. Worshipping power and hierarchy are cultural characteristics of countries with high power distance, while advocating

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equality is a characteristic of countries with low power distance. As a typical representative of high power distance, traditional Chinese culture emphasizes the "dignity of teachers," and there is a certain degree of inequality between teachers and students. This inequality precisely fulfills the dependency needs ingrained in students' hearts. For example, there are strict disciplines in the classroom, the teacher leads the communication, and students can only speak in class with the permission of the teacher. Under the influence of such cultural traditions, students demonstrate respect for and dependence on "authority," leading to insufficient awareness of "criticism and innovation."

"Uncertainty avoidance" refers to the degree of threat a society feels from uncertain and ambiguous scenarios, as well as the degree of need for security. People with a high uncertainty avoidance index (i.e., low tolerance for uncertainty) are characterized by a fear of vague and uncommon risks, as well as increased stress and anxiety. They often try their best to avoid uncertainty through rules and regulations, safety measures, and their belief in the absolute truth. Children with certain factors are not good at generating innovative ideas; those with a low uncertainty avoidance index (that is, high tolerance for uncertainty) are characterized by accepting each day as it comes, giving children relatively loose rules, and easily generating innovative ideas. Chinese culture scores low on this dimension, so students tend to "not strictly follow the rules." The procedures in both study and life are less standardized. Sometimes they use vague concepts, such as "almost," instead of clear ones. regulations, so in terms of observing discipline and being "cautious about independence," they are consistently unsatisfactory. Of course, as management levels improve and people's concepts of "obeying laws and regulations" strengthen, "rigor" and "standardization" are also constantly increasing.

In the dimension of "individualism-collectivism," "individualism-collectivism" refers to the relationship between individuals and groups in society. Individualism refers to a loose social structure that is more tolerant of others and has a more extroverted personality, while collectivism refers to a tight social structure that places more emphasis on filial piety and collective rules and tends to be introverted. In traditional Chinese culture, people's behavior is more considered from the collective perspective. Under the influence of this traditional culture, people value the collective and are willing to seek a collective sense of belonging. For instance, during interactions with others, students tend to prioritize the opinions of others, adhere to behavioral norms, prioritize honesty with friends, and even demonstrate a willingness to compromise, all in an effort to create a positive impression in others' eyes and secure a well-respected reputation. This kind of orientation helps to avoid hostile or confrontational behaviors in interpersonal communication, reduces interpersonal and social internal friction, and makes interpersonal relationships full of strong human touch, stable, and lasting. This orientation, often referred to as "many friends, many roads," fosters a strong and lasting connection between individuals. It is easy for them to form a deep emotional connection. However, caring too much about the group and others, as well as liking to "go with the crowd," can easily suppress the development of individuality. In traditional cultures such as "shooting the first bird," students are prone to avoid expressing their opinions in public.

Therefore, under the Chinese cultural background, students generally show insufficient critical and innovative consciousness and innovative ideas and are unwilling to express

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themselves, resulting in a depressed personality and easy compliance with rules and regulations.

# A Review of Research on the Impact of Psychological Capital on College Students' Innovative Behavior

According to psychological capital concept and resource-based theory, psychological capital is essentially the basis of human resource quality; that is, the realization of innovative behavior depends on the effective use of human resources and psychological quality, which is the difficulty faced in the process of innovation. With setbacks providing the best nutrients for innovation and motivation to overcome difficulties, we can understand that college students' psychological capital can affect their innovative behavior.

Universities' characteristics stem from the intensive transfer of technology and knowledge. As a result, individual college students' competitive advantage comes from the new technologies and knowledge brought about by their innovative behaviors, which form barriers to competition. However, college students' psychological quality, knowledge, and skills, along with the effective combination of various resources, determine their ability to engage in innovative behaviors. Single technologies, knowledge, and skills are not enough to achieve innovation.

Luthans and Youssef's (2004), concept of psychological capital demonstrates the superiority of psychological capital over human and social capital. Resource-based theory also proposes that unique resources can create competitive advantages, and strong psychological capital is also a unique resource. 1. In the Chinese context, Ding (2012), made a theoretical analysis of the employment mechanism in terms of psychological capital. The psychological capital of college students is a beneficial tool for transforming potential functions into actual functions, and the generation of psychological capital by college students will further promote their human capital and the development of social capital. In addition, college students' adaptability to the environment is another unique resource. A single resource does not determine innovative behavior; instead, the psychological quality and dynamic response ability of employees play a crucial role. These are valuable resources.

Tian & Xu (2015) examined the impact of various psychological capital elements on the formation of college students' entrepreneurial teams, positing that psychological capital manifests in three aspects: Self-efficacy is the basic trait of college students' entrepreneurial teams; Hope and optimism are the catalysts for team entrepreneurial motivation; Resilience is the positive energy of college student entrepreneurial teams. Peng, Zhang, and Wang (2014), conducted a questionnaire survey among 456 college students in Jiangsu Province and explored the impact of psychological capital on college students' entrepreneurial intentions. The study found that psychological capital has a significant positive impact on college students' entrepreneurial intentions. Further regression analysis also found that the three dimensions of psychological capital, including self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience, can significantly predict college students' entrepreneurial intentions.

From the above theoretical analysis and empirical research, we can see that scholars have proven from different angles that college students' psychological capital has an important impact on promoting college students' growth and future career development.

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Despite the limitations of existing theoretical and empirical research, it is evident that studying the accumulation of psychological capital in college students plays a crucial role in fostering the holistic development of individual college students.

# **Critique of Psychological Capital for Innovation Behavior**

The earliest application of the research paradigm between psychological capital and outcome variables is the Main Effect Model. Scholars believe that psychological capital has a direct effect on relevant outcome variables at the individual, group, and organizational levels, and its effect is independent of other variables. After some time, the construction orientation of psychological capital theory changed, and many empirical studies were done by scholars. As a result, the research paradigm of psychological capital slowly grew to include the buffering effect model, the moderate effect model, and the dynamic effect model. We can further subdivide the outcome variables at the organizational and individual levels. The impact of psychological capital on outcome variables and mechanisms of action is very complex and requires further research.

Therefore, even though psychological capital plays such an important role, it alone cannot produce innovative employee behavior. Therefore, it requires the activation of an intermediary that matches the mechanism of action. It is a well-known conclusion among scholars and practitioners that psychological capital has a positive effect on innovative behavior. However, because psychological capital plays a significant role in positive organizational psychology and significantly influences outcome factors, the impact of psychological capital on innovative behavior remains uncertain. There are many constraints on its improvement, so although psychological capital has a positive impact on college students' innovative behavior, is there a transmission mechanism for other intermediary variables under specific situational boundaries? This requires further research on how psychological capital affects innovative employee behavior.

# A Review of the Impact of Autonomous Motivation and Knowledge Sharing on College Students' Innovative Behavior

Autonomous Motivation for Innovative Behavior

Self-determination theory proposes that people in social environments have three basic psychological needs: ability needs, autonomy needs, and relationship needs. Ability requirements primarily refer to an individual's need for environmental control. The need for autonomy, or self-determination, is the need for an individual to make free choices about behavior based on a full understanding of personal needs and environmental information. Competence and autonomy requirements are the direct causes of intrinsic motivation. However, human activities extend beyond fulfilling personal needs. They will also take action to satisfy the needs of others. This intrinsic motivation comes from relationship needs; that is, individuals want to receive care, understanding, and support from the surrounding environment or others. According to self-determination theory, if the social environment supports and promotes the satisfaction of these three needs, human motivation and nature will develop positively, and the individual will grow healthy. Positive psychology has absorbed the ideas of self-determination theory and established a specific theoretical foundation for it. Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory (SDT) distinguishes five types of motivation regulation based on the degree of internalization of external motivating factors: external regulation, introjected control, identification regulation, integrated regulation, and internal

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motivation. The different degrees of self-determination classify external regulation and introjected regulation as controlled motivation, while identification regulation, integrated regulation, and internal motivation fall under autonomous motivation. Controlling motivation refers to an individual's motivation to perform a certain behavior due to internal (such as guilt) or external (such as other people's demands) pressure; autonomous motivation refers to an individual's motivation to act out of one's wishes, including internal motivation in the traditional sense. Wang et al (2022), distinguish between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The self-determination theory offers a fresh viewpoint on the role of motivation in creativity. It emphasizes that an individual's ability to integrate their internal and external motivations with environmental factors shapes the impact of motivation on creativity, rather than solely relying on internal or external motivation. realized (Hennessey, 2000). Eisenberger and Shanock (2003), pointed out that autonomous motivation can promote creativity more than controlled motivation because it provides a greater degree of freedom and allows individuals to solve problems in a more divergent way. Scholars are still debating the relationship between internal and external motivation and creativity. Follow-up research should focus on the following issues: First, the academic community does not yet know much about the mechanism by which autonomous motivation affects creativity. Although some research has proposed that autonomous motivation may promote creativity by affecting an individual's way of thinking (more divergent thinking) (Eisenberger & Shanock, 2003), this proposition cannot exclude other possibilities; that is, autonomous motivation may also promote creativity through variables that affect individual cognitive effort, persistence, emotion, etc. and then act on creative thinking.

### **Knowledge Sharing for Innovative Behavior**

In today's knowledge economy, knowledge innovation is an important prerequisite for the sustainable development of core competitiveness in the current era of the knowledge economy. Knowledge sharing is the key to innovation and has a significant impact. Through knowledge sharing among teams, college students can not only improve their knowledge reserves but also be able to systematize and socialize their knowledge, create new knowledge at the same time, and continuously improve innovation capabilities. Through knowledge sharing, individuals can share their views and opinions on issues. Knowledge sharing from various perspectives can generate more creativity and ideas, which can then form innovative behaviors (Xu, Xu, 2004; Cao, 2017). As a result, sharing personal knowledge can encourage students to express entrepreneurial intentions, such as product development and technological innovation (Moorman & Miner, 1998; De Clercq, Honig, & Martin, 2013). Organizational members' facilitation of knowledge sharing plays a crucial role in the learning process, transforming individuals' tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge through interactions (Von Krogh et al., 2012). Knowledge sharing is regarded as a cornerstone of efficient performance in higher education settings and a critical factor in enhancing university innovation (Mathew, 2010). Knowledge sharing in higher education institutions can promote institutional innovation and maintain competitiveness (Al-Husseini & Elbeltagi, 2018).

### Critique of Autonomous Motivation and Knowledge Sharing for Innovation Behavior

However, there are few studies on the innovative behavior, knowledge sharing, and autonomous motivation of college students in the Chinese context. Therefore, exploring the path and mechanism of "psychological capital-knowledge sharing-autonomous motivation-

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innovative behavior" from research theory can make up for the current situation and fill research gaps.

#### Conclusion

Determine the importance of psychological capital based on development trends and the psychological resources that act on improving abilities. Performance and employee innovation are the main uses of psychological capital. Compared to companies that mobilize their employees to develop new ideas and products for profit, using psychological capital for student growth appears to be more beneficial for public welfare and development. In the future, improving the psychological capital of members of society will promote social innovation.

Chinese college students are accustomed to the strict test-taking system in primary and secondary schools. Teachers guide them primarily to enhance their scores. They fully trust and follow the teachers' experience and practices, which makes them timid about making decisions, challenges, and innovations on their own. Chinese universities popularize innovation and entrepreneurship competitions, showcasing students with national awards as recipients of scholarships. It also serves as a crucial tool for teachers to assess their professional credentials, enabling schools to secure additional funding approvals. Because of these factors, there is a phenomenon where teachers prepare templates for students to modify for competition while ignoring the original intention of focusing on students. This stage of higher education calls for a reversal of the previous scenario. Educational policies encouraged students to innovate independently, but they once again had a negative impact.

Although the potential of psychological capital to improve students' innovative abilities has been recognized, there is currently a lack of systematic empirical research to specifically quantify the relationship between psychological capital and students' innovative behaviors. In addition, most research focuses on the impact of psychological capital on workplace performance, and the mechanism and effect of psychological capital in the field of education have not been deeply explored. Existing research pays less attention to the impact of psychological capital on students in the educational stage, such as the cultivation and application of psychological capital in college students. This has important implications for designing periodic education policies and interventions.

Schools and policymakers can consider incorporating the measurement and assessment of psychological capital into schools' educational evaluation systems. This not only helps to monitor and improve the quality of education, but also serves as a basis for future education policies and resource allocation, thereby comprehensively improving students' learning and life experience. The cultivation of psychological capital can not only improve students' resilience etc., but also lay a solid foundation for their all-round development and future social participation.

Current research rarely addresses how to effectively integrate psychological capital theory into the existing education system, especially in a large-scale education system like China. How to adapt and apply psychological capital theory in different cultural and educational environments to adapt to local educational needs and challenges remains a key issue to be resolved. Filling these research gaps will help to understand and utilize

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psychological capital more comprehensively and promote educational innovation and student personal development.

Here we will try to mobilize students' psychological capital and enhance the four aspects of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience to improve students' knowledge sharing and autonomous motivation. Once students achieve these improvements, we will assess whether their innovative consciousness will increase over time. Its improvement provides positive guidance and an atmospheric influence on the innovation atmosphere.

The Chinese government and people are paying more and more attention to the importance of mental health, especially with the development. They have introduced full-time mental health teachers in primary and secondary schools and universities, and they regularly carry out activities to promote the development of healthy and positive psychology. Therefore, they have explored it from the perspective of psychological capital and implemented it in practice. I predict it will have a positive impact on students' innovation and overall psychological status.

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