

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AND INTEGRITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout history, leaders have recognized the importance of human character. Character can be defined as, “those interpretable and habitual qualities within individuals, and applicable to organizations that both constrain and lead them to desire and pursue personal and societal good” [9, p.257]. Wright [9] posits that there are certain long acknowledged “master” strengths of character, which are each grounded in strong theory development. These include self-regulation (consistently regulating one’s behaviors), industry (pride in task completion), valor (facing up to challenges), integrity (truthfulness and accountability), and critical thinking (analyzes issues from various perspectives).

Character strengths influence decision making and help shape behaviors. Related to the workplace, research has shown that middle-level managers’ integrity relates significantly to their rated performance. In addition, integrity has been found to be more important to the performance of top-level executives relative to other character strengths [2]. In the educational environment, academic integrity has been linked with higher levels of learning quality [1].

The core construct of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) has also shown to be consistently related to positive outcomes in both the workplace and in educational settings. PsyCap is comprised of the positive psychological resources of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. In numerous empirical studies, PsyCap has been demonstrated to be positively related to a variety of employee behavioral, attitudinal, and performance outcomes in the workplace [5]. Additionally, and of relevance to this study, PsyCap has been shown in scientific studies in the published research to have strong relationships with several important student outcomes in the academic domain such as academic performance [4] and student engagement [6].

To date, there have been no studies assessing the impact that Academic PsyCap may have on the character strength of integrity. This is an exploratory study which is intended to help analyze the relationship between these two important student-centered variables. To explore this relationship, we surveyed 179 undergraduate business students to self-report their levels of Academic PsyCap and Integrity. Academic PsyCap was measured using the 24-item survey adapted for college students from [5]. Both measures demonstrated good reliability with Cronbach alpha scores of  $\alpha = .933$  (Academic PsyCap) and  $\alpha = .823$  (Integrity). We calculated bivariate correlations which indicated a significant positive correlation between Academic PsyCap and Integrity ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ) for the subjects in this study. The correlations and summary statistics are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1- Summary Statistics and Correlations**

	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Integrity	5.95	0.71	3.63	7								
Psychological capital	4.62	0.66	2.04	6.79	0.34							
Work hours	19.87	12.05	0	70	-0.03	-0.04						
Female	0.42	0.5	0	1	0.21	0.09	0.06					
Non-white	0.24	0.43	0	1	-0.14	0.01	-0.14	0.05				
Age	24.71	3.04	21	45	0.06	-0.02	0.02	0.01	0.11			
Part-time student	0.03	0.18	0	1	-0.09	0.08	0.07	0.03	-0.1	0.07		
Not working	0.26	0.44	0	1	-0.06	0.02	-0.06	-0.2	0.17	-0.04	-0.11	
ACT score	22.27	3.68	15	32	-0.09	0.05	0.08	-0.03	-0.38	-0.17	0.1	-0.08

N=179 Correlations>|0.15| are significant p<.05

Violations of academic integrity remain a prevalent problem among college students on a global scale [8]. Extended into the workplace, research has demonstrated that individuals who engage in academic dishonesty while in college are more likely to participate in unethical misconduct on the job [7]. Given that prior research results have established that PsyCap levels are malleable and open to change [3], it is suggested that the integration of PsyCap development activities within business school curricula could lead to higher levels of integrity among business students. In turn, this could lead to fewer incidents of academic dishonesty, higher levels of learning quality, and more ethical and productive business students entering the workforce.

**Keywords:** Integrity, Character Strengths, Psychological Capital

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