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Psychological Capital and Coping Strategies in Pharmaceutical Sales Channel Management

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the effects of psychological capital (PsyCap)—comprising hope, resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy—on job engagement and burnout among salespeople in the pharmaceutical distribution sector. It further explores the mediating role of coping strategies. **Research design, data and methodology:** Data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 207 sales representatives working at pharmaceutical companies in South Korea. The questionnaire employed validated scales to measure PsyCap, coping strategies, adaptive selling behavior, selling effort, and emotional exhaustion, each rated on a five-point Likert scale. Reliability and validity were confirmed, and structural equation modeling was used to test the hypothesized relationships. **Results:** Results showed that PsyCap was positively associated with adaptive selling behavior and selling effort, and negatively associated with emotional exhaustion. Mediation analyses revealed that problem-focused coping strategies mediated the positive links between PsyCap and both selling effort and adaptive selling behavior, whereas emotion-focused coping explained its negative association with emotional exhaustion. **Conclusions:** This study highlights the role of psychological capital as an internal resource that fosters job engagement—positive work state—and reduces burnout. By identifying coping strategies as key mediators, the findings offer actionable insights for enhancing salesperson well-being and effectiveness in the pharmaceutical distribution sector.

Keywords : Pharmaceutical Sales Channel, Psychological Capital, Coping Strategies, Job Engagement, Distribution Management

JEL Classification Code: M31, M12, L84

1. Introduction

Pharmaceutical distribution channels are characterized by a distinctive structure in which medical regulation, public health, and ethical responsibility are tightly interwoven (Dănescu & Popa, 2020; Santoro & Gorrie, 2005). In Korea, these channels follow an indirect B2B2C arrangement, with

physicians and pharmacists serving as intermediate consumers, and core transactions occurring between pharmaceutical suppliers and medical institutions (Kim & Kim, 2020). Products ultimately reach end users through relationship-based exchanges built on trusted information (Anis & Hassali, 2022; Suh et al., 2011). Combining features of both B2B and B2C transactions (Turban et al.,

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2015; Ukaj et al., 2020), the Korean model places greater emphasis on cultivating relational value than on competing on price (Hinterhuber et al., 2021; Almomani, 2019). In such highly regulated, product-intensive environments, firms enhance service quality and information delivery by maintaining close ties with medical professionals, thereby indirectly shaping the experience of final consumers. Within this structure, salespeople function as critical boundary spanners, linking channel partners and end users in ways that directly influence both relationship quality and overall channel performance (Singh et al., 1996; Luthans et al., 2007).

Unlike the United States—dominated by insurance frameworks and pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) (Mattingly, Hyman, & Bai, 2023)—or China, where state procurement plays a central role (Zhang et al., 2023), Korea's pharmaceutical distribution system relies less on institutionalized mechanisms and more on the competence and initiative of sales representatives (Jeong, Ahn, & Yi, 2017). Salespeople must therefore manage a wide spectrum of responsibilities, ranging from communicating complex product information and responding to regulatory changes to resolving supply fluctuations and fostering durable trust (Kiers et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2022; Sombultawee et al., 2022). In settings where trust is the foundation of transactions, the mismanagement of channel conflicts or information gaps can erode trust, undermine revenues, and damage long-term partnerships (Lussier et al., 2023; Itani et al., 2025; Habel et al., 2021).

For these reasons, sustaining both performance and partnership stability requires more than organizational infrastructure—it also hinges on the psychological resources and coping skills of individual salespeople. Psychological capital (PsyCap)—comprising self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience—functions as a critical resource, enabling adaptation in challenging circumstances while supporting positive work attitudes (Luthans et al., 2007; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Coping strategies, in turn, refer to the cognitive and behavioral responses individuals employ to manage perceived stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and can serve as a key pathway through which PsyCap is associated with both job performance and employee well-being.

This research addresses three principal gaps in the literature. First, much of the work on distribution channels has explained performance through macro-level design choices and inter-organizational factors—such as authority structures, contractual arrangements, and the quality of partnerships (Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Ganesan, 1994). Far less attention has been devoted to how the psychological capacities and coping behaviors of frontline salespeople—the actors directly operating within these systems—affect channel outcomes. By placing PsyCap and coping strategies at the center of the analysis, this study examines their role in

shaping job engagement and emotional exhaustion (Wharton & Erickson, 1993; Miao & Evans, 2013).

Second, while prior studies on PsyCap, job stress, and burnout have been conducted primarily in general organizational contexts or within conventional B2B/B2C frameworks (Luthans et al., 2007; Avey et al., 2011), research situated in specialized B2B2C pharmaceutical settings remains scarce. These channels are distinctive in that regulation, product complexity, and trust-based interactions converge (Delpechitre & Beeler, 2018; Brown & Peterson, 1994; Hollet-Haudebert et al., 2011). This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing how PsyCap functions within the Korean pharmaceutical distribution channel and examining its relationships with both engagement and emotional exhaustion (Saks, 2006; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). Newman et al. (2014) argued that the effects of PsyCap may vary across contexts and called for closer attention to the boundary conditions under which its influence is amplified or diminished. Building on this notion, this study posits that the distinctive characteristics of B2B2C pharmaceutical distribution channels serve as contextual boundary conditions that can magnify the role of PsyCap. In line with this argument, Hobfoll (1989) suggested that personal resources become particularly salient under high-demand conditions, and Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) similarly emphasized that resources such as PsyCap are especially critical in such contexts because they can buffer the detrimental effects of job demands and protect employees from strain. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes the Korean pharmaceutical distribution industry as a high-demand context and examines whether PsyCap functions as a vital resource that helps salespeople sustain their work engagement and alleviate emotional exhaustion, thereby clarifying its theoretical and practical significance in this demanding environment.

Third, although the positive influence of PsyCap is well established (Avey et al., 2011), the mechanisms through which its effects emerge—particularly the mediating role of coping strategies—remain underexplored (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Most prior studies have examined engagement and exhaustion as separate outcomes, rather than considering their joint dynamics. A more integrative approach is needed, one that can be illuminated by the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2003; Hakanen et al., 2008) and guided by Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). To address this gap, the present study proposes a dual-path mediation model in which PsyCap is expected to be positively associated with engagement through problem-focused coping and negatively associated with emotional exhaustion through reduced reliance on emotion-focused coping. This

integrated perspective provides deeper insights into how psychological resources and coping mechanisms jointly shape work outcomes in distribution channel settings.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews prior research, Section 3 presents the conceptual model and hypotheses, Section 4 outlines the methodology, Section 5 reports the results, and Section 6 discusses implications, limitations, and opportunities for future study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Psychological Capital (PsyCap)

PsyCap is defined as an individual's positive psychological state of development, comprising four components—hope, efficacy, optimism, and resilience—which together form a higher-order core construct (Luthans & Jensen, 2005; Luthans et al., 2007).

Hope involves both the willpower (agency) and the ability to generate pathways to achieve goals (Snyder et al., 1991). It reflects creative energy and the capacity to explore multiple strategies toward goal attainment (Luthans et al., 2007). Efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to mobilize motivation and cognitive resources to accomplish a task (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). It is a strong predictor of persistence, proactive behavior, and job performance (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Vieira et al., 2022). Optimism is characterized by positive future expectations and the belief that favorable outcomes are likely to occur (Luthans et al., 2007; Scheier & Carver, 1985; Erden, 2025). Optimistic individuals tend to attribute positive events to internal, stable, and global causes, whereas they interpret negative events as stemming from external, temporary, and situation-specific factors, enabling them to respond to stress with greater flexibility (Seligman, 1999). Resilience is the capacity to recover and adapt effectively in the face of adversity, uncertainty, or change (Luthans, 2002). It promotes persistence and psychological flexibility in challenging situations (Coutu, 2002).

PsyCap has been shown to facilitate positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, psychological well-being, and performance, while mitigating negative outcomes like burnout, turnover intentions, and cynicism (Avey et al., 2011; Karatepe & Karadas, 2014; Aydin Sünbül & Aslan Gördesli, 2021; Liu et al., 2024; Zambrano-Chumo et al., 2024; Hazan-Liran & Karni-Vizer, 2024).

2.2. Coping Strategies

Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts individuals use to manage stressors that surpass their

available resources, with the goal of conserving emotional, cognitive, or physical energy by addressing the source of stress or mitigating its emotional impact (Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Among the various coping strategies, problem-focused and emotion-focused coping are the two most extensively studied.

Problem-focused coping involves actively addressing the source of stress through problem-solving efforts, such as generating solutions, evaluating alternatives, and taking action to alter the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In contrast, emotion-focused coping aims to regulate negative emotional responses to stress through strategies such as emotional expression, cognitive avoidance, positive reinterpretation, or distraction (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Fluharty et al., 2021).

Empirical studies suggest that these two coping strategies lead to distinct outcomes: problem-focused coping tends to be linked to more favorable psychological and behavioral results, whereas emotion-focused coping is often associated with negative outcomes (Compas et al., 2001; Cho & Choi, 2024).

2.3. Adaptive Selling Behavior and Selling Effort as Core Dimensions of Job Engagement in Sales Contexts

Kahn (1990) conceptualized job engagement as a motivational state in which individuals invest their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies into the performance of their work roles. Building upon this framework, Rich et al. (2010) emphasized that job engagement entails both cognitive and behavioral effort. Later, Miao and Evans (2013) extended this concept to the sales context, identifying adaptive selling behavior and selling effort as core behavioral manifestations of job engagement. Based on these insights, the present study regards these two constructs as key dimensions that reflect job engagement among salespeople.

Adaptive selling behavior, a customer-oriented sales strategy, is defined by Spiro and Weitz (1990) as “the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation” (p. 62). This behavior enables salespeople to respond flexibly to diverse customer needs, and sales situations, and has been positively associated with customer satisfaction (Usman et al., 2024), customer loyalty (Román & Martín, 2014), customer orientation, and sales performance (Chang & Lin, 2024; Yeo & Jan, 2022; Zheng et al., 2023). Factors that facilitate adaptive selling include intrinsic motivation (Ahmad et al., 2021), selling skills (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2022), customer orientation (Nguyen et al., 2022), cognitive empathy (Locander et al., 2020), personality traits (e.g., openness to

experience, conscientiousness, extraversion; Homburg et al., 2024), and sales training (Chaker et al., 2025). Of particular relevance to this study, positive PsyCap—encompassing self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience—may serve as an internal motivational resource that is related to a higher likelihood of adaptive selling behavior, especially in challenging or ambiguous sales environments. In contrast, characteristics such as agreeableness or neuroticism (Homburg et al., 2024) and role ambiguity (Román & Iacobucci, 2010) may hinder adaptive selling behavior.

Selling effort, meanwhile, refers to “the force, energy, or activity exerted in the performance of a task” (Brown & Peterson, 1994, p. 71). It is widely acknowledged as a central determinant of sales performance, as salespeople who invest more effort—through increased customer contact time, job-related activities, and persistent task involvement—tend to achieve superior sales outcomes (Christen et al., 2006; Sujana et al., 1994). Prior studies have identified several antecedents of selling effort. From the salesperson’s perspective, these include self-efficacy (Fu et al., 2009), which has been further linked in recent studies to proactive selling behaviors and performance outcomes (Kalra et al., 2021; Edwards et al., 2022), customer orientation (Singh & Venugopal, 2015), perceived customer demandingness (Jaramillo & Mulki, 2008), and individual motivation (Brown & Peterson, 1994; Rodríguez et al., 2024). From the managerial side, factors such as sales control systems (Miao & Evans, 2013) and supportive leadership (Jaramillo & Mulki, 2008) have been found to significantly influence sales effort.

Taken together, both adaptive selling behavior and selling effort represent tangible expressions of job engagement within the sales domain. As internal psychological resources such as positive PsyCap are activated, salespeople are more likely to exhibit higher levels of flexibility, persistence, and involvement in their roles. Drawing on this theoretical foundation, the present study aims to examine how positive PsyCap fosters job engagement through its influence on adaptive selling behavior and selling effort.

2.4. Emotional Exhaustion as a Dimension of Burnout in Sales Contexts

Burnout has traditionally been conceptualized as comprising three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Among these, emotional exhaustion—defined as the depletion of emotional and physical energy—has been consistently recognized as the core component of burnout (Said & Tanova, 2021). In sales environments, where emotional labor and frequent customer interactions are integral to the role, emotional exhaustion is

particularly prevalent and salient (Edmondson et al., 2019; Childs et al., 2024). Previous studies have demonstrated that emotional exhaustion is negatively associated with various work-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Santiago-Torner et al., 2024), organizational commitment (Croucher et al., 2024), and performance (Corbeau et al., 2023), while positively related to turnover intentions (Rutherford et al., 2023). While these adverse outcomes underscore the significance of emotional exhaustion in organizational settings, the present study does not seek to re-examine these well-established consequences. Rather, this study focuses on the antecedents of emotional exhaustion, particularly on how individual psychological resources can mitigate its occurrence.

Specifically, the current research investigates the role of PsyCap as a personal resource that is linked to the use of effective coping strategies and thereby is negatively associated with emotional exhaustion. By addressing the mechanisms through which PsyCap influences emotional depletion in salespeople, this study aims to contribute to a more preventive and resource-focused understanding of burnout in sales contexts.

3. Hypotheses Development and Research Model

3.1. Research Model

The research model in Figure 1 suggests that positive PsyCap is positively associated with adaptive selling behavior and selling effort, and negatively associated with emotional exhaustion. Problem-focused coping strategies mediate the relationship between positive PsyCap and both adaptive selling behavior and selling effort, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies mediate the relationship with emotional exhaustion.

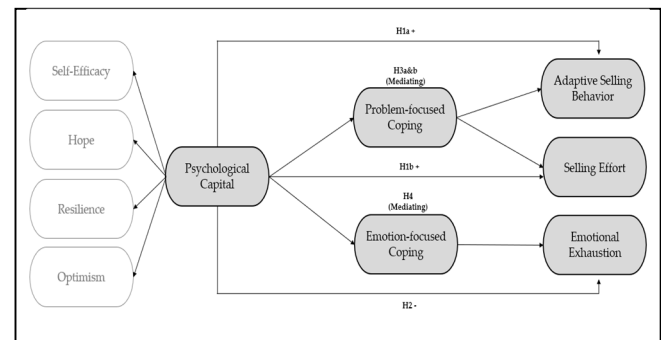


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

3.2. PsyCap and Adaptive Selling Behavior and Selling Effort

According to Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions expand individuals' cognitive and behavioral repertoires, enabling them to respond more flexibly and constructively to situational demands. Such emotions foster openness to problem-solving, facilitate sustained effort, and provide the psychological energy necessary to adapt to dynamic work environments (Baumeister et al., 2006; Fredrickson, 2003). Within this theoretical framework, PsyCap functions as a personal resource that is associated with higher levels of self-regulation, motivation, and effective stress management (Fedai & Kapusuz, 2015; Paterson et al., 2014).

Individuals with high levels of PsyCap tend to invest greater energy in their work and exhibit higher levels of job engagement, driven by their optimistic outlook and determination to achieve goals (Avey et al., 2008; Hakanen et al., 2008; Salanova et al., 2010). These psychological resources are particularly critical in sales contexts, where employees face frequent customer interactions and performance pressures. Salespeople with strong PsyCap are more likely to adapt their sales strategies based on customer needs, set challenging goals, and maintain sustained effort despite external obstacles (Román & Iacobucci, 2010; Seaton & Beaumont, 2015; Strauss et al., 2015). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1:** Positive PsyCap positively associated with (a) adaptive selling behavior and (b) selling effort.

3.3. PsyCap and Emotional Exhaustion

According to the broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions promote an optimistic perspective and help reduce negative attitudes such as cynicism toward organizational change (Fredrickson, 2001). PsyCap, which includes cognitive, emotional, and motivational resources, serves as a buffer against stress and enhances individuals' capacity to cope with work-related challenges (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Peterson, 2000).

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that PsyCap components—self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience—are negatively associated with burnout, job cynicism, and stress (Avey et al., 2010; Cheung et al., 2011). Employees with high PsyCap are more resilient to resource depletion, while those with low PsyCap are more vulnerable to stress and may exhibit maladaptive responses to organizational demands (Alessandri et al., 2018). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

- H2:** Positive PsyCap negatively associated with emotional exhaustion.

3.3. The Mediator Effect of Coping Strategies

According to psychological capital theory, individuals with high levels of PsyCap tend to evaluate their circumstances and likelihood of success positively, which facilitates the adoption of adaptive coping strategies while reducing reliance on maladaptive mechanisms (Luthans et al., 2007). Prior research has consistently shown that PsyCap influences individuals' preferences for coping strategies in stressful situations (Ding et al., 2015; Yan & Zhang, 2016). Those with high PsyCap tend to maintain confidence and optimism under pressure, making them less prone to avoidance behaviors or emotional defensiveness (Maykrantz et al., 2021). Coping strategies have been found to mediate the relationship between PsyCap and various outcomes such as psychological distress, job burnout, and perceived stress (Ding et al., 2015; Maykrantz et al., 2021). For instance, Wang et al. (2022) demonstrated that problem-focused coping mediates the link between PsyCap and well-being. High-PsyCap individuals are more likely to engage in proactive problem-solving and persist in goal-directed behavior despite obstacles (Luthans et al., 2007). Self-efficacy drives sustained effort (Fu et al., 2009; Yaban & Gaschler, 2025), hope fosters strategic goal pursuit (Peterson & Byron, 2008; Shan, J., & Xu, 2025), optimism supports positive expectations (Bryant & Cvengros, 2004; Mahn et al., 2024), and resilience promotes flexibility and customer-oriented behavior (Lussier & Hartmann, 2017). Conversely, individuals with low PsyCap are more likely to disengage from goals and adopt emotion-focused coping to reduce distress, which may lead to increased fatigue and emotional exhaustion (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Reducing reliance on emotion-focused coping has been shown to mitigate emotional exhaustion (Montero-Marin et al., 2014). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H3:** PsyCap is positively related to (a) adaptive selling behavior and (b) selling effort, and these relationships are mediated by problem-focused coping strategies.
- H4:** PsyCap is negatively related to emotional exhaustion, and this relationship is mediated by reduced reliance on emotion-focused coping strategies.

4. Methodology

4.1. Sample and Data Collection

This study employed a structured questionnaire administered to pharmaceutical sales representatives involved in the distribution of over-the-counter (OTC) medications to pharmacies. Participants were drawn from both domestic and multinational pharmaceutical companies. Of the 420 questionnaires distributed, 300 were returned.

After excluding 93 incomplete or invalid responses, a final sample of 207 valid responses was retained. These responses were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods to examine the relationships among the key variables of interest.

The final sample was predominantly male (89.4%). The largest age group was respondents in their 30s (53.6%), and the vast majority (93.7%) held a four-year university degree. Most participants were employed at the staff level (30%). The average age of the respondents was 35.96 years (SD = 5.71).

4.2. Measurements

This study was conducted using measurement items that have been validated for reliability and validity in previous research within the relevant fields. All items were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The variables used to test the hypotheses in this study include PsyCap, coping strategies, adaptive selling behavior, selling effort, and emotional exhaustion.

PsyCap was measured using the 13-item Psychological Capital Questionnaire (Luthans et al., 2007), which includes four items for self-efficacy, three items for hope, three items for optimism, and three items for resilience, all assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. Coping strategies were categorized into problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies. For this study, the survey items developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) were adapted to suit the research objectives, with six items for problem-focused coping strategies and seven items for emotion-focused coping strategies.

Adaptive selling behavior was measured using six items based on the survey items developed by Román and Iacobucci (2010), assessed with a 5-point Likert scale. Selling effort was measured using three items based on the scale developed by Sujan et al. (1994), using a 5-point Likert scale as well. Emotional exhaustion was assessed with six items based on the scale developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), evaluated using the 5-point Likert scale.

The measurement items used in this study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Scale Items and Construct Evaluation

Construct		Scale items	α	AVE	CR
PsyCap1 (efficacy)	PsyCap1_1	I feel confident analyzing a long-term problem to find a solution.	0.80	0.53	0.90
	PsyCap1_2	I feel confident in representing my work area in meetings with management.			
	PsyCap1_3	I feel confident contributing to discussions about the company's strategy.			
	PsyCap1_4	I feel confident helping to set targets/goals in my work area.			
PsyCap2 (hope)	PsyCap2_1	If I should find myself in a jam at work, I could think of many ways to get out of it.	0.60	0.51	0.86
	PsyCap2_2	I can think of many ways to reach my current work goals.			
	PsyCap2_3	At this time, I am meeting the work goals that I have set for myself.			
PsyCap3 (resilience)	PsyCap3_1	I can be "on my own," so to speak, at work if I have to.	0.64	0.50	0.85
	PsyCap3_2	I usually take stressful things at work in stride.			
	PsyCap3_3	I can get through difficult times at work because I've experienced difficulty before.			
PsyCap4 (optimism)	PsyCap4_1	I always look on the bright side of things regarding my job.	0.67	0.50	0.83
	PsyCap4_2	I'm optimistic about what will happen to me in the future as it pertains to work.			
	PsyCap4_3	I approach this job as if every cloud has a silver lining			
Problem-focused Coping	PBF_1	I come up with several alternative solutions to the problem.	0.83	0.53	0.93
	PBF_2	I make a plan and follow it.			
	PBF_3	I give my best effort to do what is necessary to solve the problem.			
	PBF_4	I decide what I think should be done and explain this to the people who are affected.			
	PBF_5	I try to work more efficiently.			
	PBF_6	I take things one step at a time.			

Construct		Scale items	α	AVE	CR
Emotion-focused Coping	EF_1	I hope a miracle will happen.	0.82	0.52	0.86
	EF_2	I avoid being with people in general.			
	EF_3	I refuse to believe it has happened.			
	EF_4	I have fantasies about how things will work out.			
	EF_5	I eat snacks.			
	EF_6	I avoid being in the situation if I can.			
	EF_7	I say to myself this is not real.			
Adaptive Selling Behavior	ASB_1	I am very flexible in the selling approaches I use.	0.85	0.56	0.93
	ASB_2	I vary my sales style from situation to situation.			
	ASB_3	I tend to use a wide variety of selling approaches with different customers.			
	ASB_4	I use different sales strategies with different customers.			
	ASB_5	I do NOT use a set sales approach.			
	ASB_6	I change my sales approach from one customer to another.			
Selling Effort	SE_1	I work long hours to meet my sales objectives.	0.69	0.64	0.90
	SE_2	I do not give up easily when I encounter a difficult customer.			
	SE_3	I work untiringly at selling a customer until I get an order.			
Emotional Exhaustion	EE_1	I feel emotionally drained from my work.	0.84	0.63	0.92
	EE_2	I feel used up at the end of the work day.			
	EE_3	I feel fatigues when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.			
	EE_4	Working with people all day is really a strain for me.			
	EE_5	I feel burned out from my work.			
	EE_6	Working with people directly puts too much stress on me.			

5. Results

5.1. Reliability and Validity

This study assessed the internal consistency of the measurement scales using Cronbach’s alpha coefficients. As shown in Table 1, all values exceeded the threshold of 0.60, indicating acceptable reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Nevertheless, some PsyCap sub-dimensions showed relatively low alpha values (.60–.67). Psychometric research has noted that Cronbach’s alpha is sensitive to violations of tau-equivalence and can underestimate true reliability when scales have a small number of items (McNeish, 2018). In light of these limitations, scholars have emphasized the importance of reporting alternative indices, such as McDonald’s ω (Dunn et al., 2014) and composite reliability within structural equation modeling (Raykov, 2004). In this study, ω ranged from .74 to .83 and CR values ranged from .83 to .93, supporting the adequacy of the measures.

Following this, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the construct validity of the measurement model. The goodness-of-fit indices for the CFA were as follows: $\chi^2(df) = 937.1(662)$, $IFI = 0.921$, $CFI = 0.917$, and $RMSEA = 0.047$. These results suggest an

adequate model fit, indicating that the latent constructs were appropriately measured. To assess convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was calculated. As shown in Table 1, all constructs exhibited AVE values 0.50 or higher, indicating adequate convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was established as the square of the inter-construct correlations was lower than the respective AVE values (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Additionally, an analysis of the correlations between the key variables was conducted. The results of the correlation analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 PsyCap	1					
2 PBF	.57**	1				
3 EF	-.17*	-.18*	1			
4 ASB	.45**	.58**	-.09	1		
5 SE	.31**	.41**	-.06	.47**	1	
6 EE	-.25**	-.05	.43**	.03	-.00	1
Mean	3.68	3.79	2.58	3.83	3.65	3.03
Standard Deviation	0.43	0.53	0.74	0.56	0.58	0.69

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

5.2. Hypotheses Testing

To test the proposed hypotheses, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and reliability analysis were conducted using SPSS 15.0. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) were then employed to examine the direct effects. Mediation effects were assessed using the bootstrapping method (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) and the Sobel test (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

The SEM results indicated a satisfactory model fit, with most indices meeting recommended criteria ($\chi^2(df) = 972.0(686)$, $IFI = .917$, $CFI = .914$, $RMSEA = .045$). The results of hypothesis testing are summarized in Table 3.

Hypothesis 1a, which proposed that positive PsyCap positively associated with adaptive selling behavior, was supported ($\gamma = .27$, $t = 2.80$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 1b, which posited a positive relationship between PsyCap and selling effort, was also supported ($\gamma = .31$, $t = 2.62$, $p < .01$). In addition, Hypothesis 2, which predicted a negative relationship between positive PsyCap and emotional exhaustion, was supported ($\gamma = -.13$, $t = -2.15$, $p < .05$).

The structural relationships among variables, derived from the main effects in Table 3, are illustrated in Figure 2.

Table 3: Results of the Structural Equations Model: Main Effects

Dependent Variables	PBF	EF	ASB	SE	EE
Main Effects					
PsyCap	.69**	-.20**	.27**	.31**	-.13*
Mediators					
PBF			.39**	.20*	
EF					.36**

Notes: ** p<0.01; * p<0.05

This study employed two mediation analysis techniques to examine the mediating role of problem-focused coping strategies in the relationships between positive PsyCap and both adaptive selling behavior and selling effort, as well as the mediating role of emotion-focused coping strategies in the relationship between positive PsyCap and emotional exhaustion.

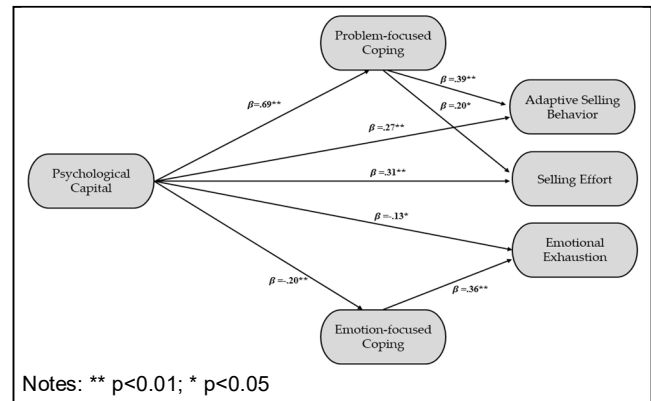


Figure 2: Structural Model with Standardized Path Coefficients

First, bootstrapping was conducted with 5,000 samples using a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval, following the procedure recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008). The results indicated that the indirect effect of problem-focused coping strategy was significant in the relationship between positive PsyCap and adaptive selling behavior ($b = .36$, $p < .05$), as well as in the relationship between positive PsyCap and selling effort ($b = .26$, $p < .05$). Thus, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were supported. In addition, the indirect effect of emotion-focused coping strategy in the relationship between positive PsyCap and emotional exhaustion was significant ($b = -.11$, $p < .05$), and therefore Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Second, to further examine the mediating effects, the Sobel test was conducted following the procedure outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). A mediation effect was considered significant if the Sobel test statistic exceeded ± 1.96 . The results revealed that problem-focused coping strategy significantly mediated the relationships between positive PsyCap and both adaptive selling behavior ($Z = 5.77$, $p < .01$) and selling effort ($Z = 4.10$, $p < .01$). Also, emotion-focused coping strategy significantly mediated the relationship between positive PsyCap and emotional exhaustion ($Z = -2.39$, $p < .01$). These findings were consistent with the results of the bootstrapping analysis.

The results of both mediation analyses are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Mediation Analysis

Hypotheses	Relationships	Bootstrapping test					Sobel test	
		Direct effect without mediation	Direct effect with mediation	Indirect effect			Z	P
				Effect	SE	LLCI-ULCI		
H3a	PsyCap>PBF>ASB	.590**	.228*	.362	.068	.240, .503	5.77	0.00
H3b	PsyCap>PBF>SE	.416**	.151	.265	.081	.121, .432	4.10	0.00
H4	PsyCap>EF>EE	-.412**	-.297**	-.115	.050	-.217, -.023	-2.39	0.01

Notes: ** p<0.01; * p<0.05

6. Discussion

This study explored how the personal cognitive and emotional resources of salespeople—specifically their positive psychological capital—shape both their adaptive behaviors at work and their psychological outcomes. Furthermore, it examined whether coping strategies mediate the relationship between PsyCap and these outcomes. For example, PsyCap positively associated with adaptive selling behavior and selling effort, while negatively associated with emotional exhaustion. Salespeople with positive PsyCap are more likely to respond positively to challenges in the work environment, supported by a strong sense of self-efficacy and optimism, which helps them put greater effort into their work and encourages their job-related engagement. A positive psychological resource is related to flexible responses in selling situations and greater selling effort, which in turn is associated with higher engagement and overall performance. Additionally, positive PsyCap reduces emotional exhaustion through appropriate coping strategies in demanding situations.

The mediating analysis revealed that problem-focused coping strategies mediate the relationship between PsyCap and both adaptive selling behavior and selling effort. Salespeople with high PsyCap are more likely to approach challenges with a problem-solving mindset, focusing on solutions and actively working to overcome obstacles. Consequently, problem-focused coping strategies contribute to greater selling effort and more adaptive selling behavior. Similarly, emotion-focused coping strategies mediate the relationship between PsyCap and emotional exhaustion. Salespeople with lower levels of PsyCap tend to prioritize emotional responses over problem-solving when faced with stress, which provides temporary relief but does not address the underlying causes, increasing the risk of emotional exhaustion. In contrast, those with higher PsyCap mitigate emotional exhaustion by fostering cognitive reappraisal and more adaptive responses to emotional pressure. These findings suggest that PsyCap is not only associated with proactive behaviors in the sales process but also related to the regulation of emotional strain in high-pressure sales environments.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of this study are as follows. First, this study distinguishes itself from prior research by placing individual-level psychological and behavioral mechanisms at the center of sales channel performance analysis. Much of the existing literature in distribution channel management has explained performance primarily through macro-structural factors such as channel design, contractual terms, governance structures, and institutional

regulations. However, such approaches have not fully accounted for the influence of salespeople's psychological states and behavioral strategies in actual channel operations. By positioning positive PsyCap and coping strategies of frontline salespeople as key variables, this study empirically identifies the mechanisms through which not only organizational control systems but also human and psychological factors determine channel performance. In doing so, it expands the analytical unit of distribution management research from the organizational or partner-firm level to the individual level and clarifies the linkage between human resource management and channel outcomes.

Second, this study addresses a gap in the literature by identifying the specific pathways that mediate the relationship between PsyCap and job performance. Previous studies have repeatedly confirmed that PsyCap is positively associated with job attitudes and performance, but they have paid relatively little attention to the behavioral and psychological strategies that operate in the process. This research incorporates problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies as mediators, applying both the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model in an integrated manner. The results demonstrate that problem-focused coping strategies are associated with resource accumulation and performance improvement in balancing resource conservation with job demands, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies are linked to resource depletion and poorer performance outcomes. By presenting this mechanism at the pathway level, the study moves beyond simple correlational interpretations and provides a richer theoretical understanding of how psychological resources function in industrial contexts.

Third, the study verifies the effects of PsyCap within the unique context of a B2B2C pharmaceutical distribution channel. This structure involves multilayered relationships between manufacturers, intermediate consumers (physicians and pharmacists), and final consumers, where trust and relationship management—rather than price—serve as the key competitive levers. The pharmaceutical industry, in particular, is characterized by regulatory intensity, product complexity, and the need for long-term, ethically grounded relationships, which raises uncertainty about whether PsyCap effects observed in general B2B or B2C settings apply in the same way. By analyzing how PsyCap and coping strategies influence channel performance in such a complex, high-involvement environment, this study proposes a human resource management model for specialized, non-price competitive contexts that have been largely absent in prior research. This provides an important theoretical foundation for future industry-specific PsyCap studies.

6.2. Managerial Implications

The practical implications of this study are as follows. First, sales managers and organizations in pharmaceutical distribution channels should strategically design systematic programs to strengthen psychological capital. Training that focuses solely on product knowledge and selling skills is insufficient for effectively responding to environmental pressures such as regulatory changes, supply instability, and channel conflict. The findings suggest that interventions aimed at enhancing self-efficacy, resilience, and optimistic thinking—such as coaching, resilience training, and positive mindset workshops—contribute to sustaining sales performance. For example, providing quarterly, tailored PsyCap assessments and feedback, coupled with case-based training linked to real-world situations, can improve the quality of partner relationships and ensure performance stability across the channel.

Second, organizations should foster environments that promote problem-focused coping strategies while reducing reliance on emotion-focused coping. This requires support systems such as (a) real-time information-sharing platforms, (b) standardized conflict-resolution processes, and (c) training programs for regulatory change management. Such systems reduce salespeople's uncertainty and psychological burden, enable consistent responses to customers and partners, and ultimately enhance both partner trust and customer experience. For instance, equipping sales teams with digital collaboration tools that allow them to share field issues with headquarters in real time and receive immediate solution proposals can greatly increase the practical implementation of problem-focused coping strategies.

6.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations. First, the reliability analysis of the PsyCap variable showed that the Cronbach's alpha values for its sub-dimensions ranged from 0.6 to 0.8. While values exceeding 0.7 are generally considered ideal for measurement tools, the observed values in this study fall within the widely accepted range and are deemed acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Furthermore, the PsyCap measurement items employed in this study align with those used in numerous prior studies, which have consistently demonstrated the reliability of these measures, particularly those following Luthans et al. (2007). This consistency further underscores the reliability and stability of the measurement tool utilized in this research. Nevertheless, the findings of this study suggest that the PsyCap measurement tools may require further refinement. Future research should explore ways to enhance the reliability of PsyCap measurements, particularly by improving item development and increasing participant focus during data collection.

Second, this study was conducted within a specific region and industry, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Specifically, the sample in this study was drawn from the pharmaceutical industry in South Korea, so different results may emerge when similar studies are conducted in other industries or regions. Future research should consider replicating this study using samples from various industries and regions to better assess the universality and generalizability of the findings.

Finally, this study operationalized job engagement through adaptive selling behavior and selling effort, consistent with prior sales literature (e.g., Miao & Evans, 2013). While this behavioral focus aligns with established practice in sales research, it does not fully capture the cognitive and emotional dimensions emphasized in Kahn's (1990) original conceptualization. Future studies should extend this approach by incorporating these dimensions to provide a more comprehensive account of engagement.

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