

# Careers Up Close: Henry Ho on Building Psychological Capital

August 30, 2021



Henry Ho is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology of The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK). He conducts multidisciplinary research to address and optimize people's psychosocial and emotional functioning in work and family domains by identifying protective factors and developing effective interventions to promote well-being.

- **Current role:** Assistant professor of psychology at The Education University of Hong Kong, 2017–present
- **Previously:** Postdoctoral fellow at the School of Public Health of the University of Hong Kong, 2014–2017
- **Terminal degree:** PhD in industrial and organizational psychology, City University of Hong Kong, 2014
- Recognized as an APS Rising Star in 2019

[See all Careers Up Close Interviews](#)

## Landing the job

To say that academia is a difficult career path would be an understatement, but I am fortunate that my academic career has gone smoothly so far. After I completed my PhD, I was employed in a postdoctoral position at the School of Public Health of the University of Hong Kong, where I led a large-scale randomized controlled trial. After almost 3 years of postdoctoral training, I felt that I was ready for the next adventure as an independent academic and started looking for faculty positions in psychology. When I saw that the Department of Psychology of EdUHK was hiring an assistant professor, I was eager to apply because there was no knowing when another opening would appear. I feel blessed that I was immediately offered a faculty position.

## **Cultivating personal strengths at work and home**

My research synthesizes the knowledge obtained from positive psychology with industrial and organizational psychology as well as family psychology.

When I received the APS Rising Star Award, most of my existing research was focused on developing, implementing, and evaluating community-based positive-psychology interventions for families. Our research team collaborated with more than 100 social service units and schools and recruited more than 4,000 participants from all 18 districts in Hong Kong. This series of intervention studies and randomized controlled trials demonstrated that positively oriented individual capacities such as gratitude and savoring can be integrated with family activities to promote family well-being and health.

Recently, I applied this knowledge to the work context to identify personal strengths and virtues that enable employees to lead meaningful, enjoyable, and fulfilling lives despite facing challenges and adversities. For example, my recent work focuses on stereotypes and discrimination against workers on the grounds of their age, family status, or mental illness. I emphasize not only the factors associated with vulnerability to these workplace stressors but also the resilience factors and self-regulatory strategies that promote higher levels of well-being and performance.

Collective practices in the organization that promote compassionate support, caring, forgiveness, and dignity or respect can foster a positive work environment and, in turn, lead to desirable work outcomes. I disseminated my research findings with practical recommendations to enhance mental wellness in the workplace in the form of research reports for different industries, including social workers and secondary school teachers.

## **Uncovering career paths**

I teach both undergraduate and master's-level courses, as well as supervise student research projects. In one of my courses, I present undergraduate students with the different types of jobs that psychologists do, the qualifications required, and the professional issues and practices involved. The objective is to engage students early in the career decision-making process.

My approach to helping students become independent researchers is to be compassionate and supportive but at the same time give them enough autonomy to experience the research process. Moreover, I am very keen to nurture my research assistants as early-career researchers. It is important to me that they join the team because they have a passion for research and that they have a clear career goal. In several

of my recent publications, I have included my research assistants as coauthors to not only recognize their contributions but also give them a sense of ownership in the projects.

## **Becoming a H.E.R.O.**

Findings from my own research suggest that psychological capital, which encompasses hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO), is one of the most potent personal resources for confronting challenges, resolving problems, and promoting well-being in the workplace. Therefore, I would recommend that early-career researchers remain hopeful by considering multiple pathways to success, foster self-efficacy by building confidence in your skills, develop the resilience needed to bounce back from setbacks, and be optimistic that your hard work will be rewarded. Psychological capital is one of the necessary ingredients that enable researchers to flourish and thrive despite challenges and adversities.

## **A positive outlook**

I enjoy conducting research about the challenges and difficulties that we face in our work and family life; the strategies that we use to regulate, cope with, and resolve them; and our psychological and emotional responses to these experiences. Testing hypotheses, generating new findings, and publishing in journals are the rewarding parts of my work. I also appreciate being able to apply my research findings to guide my own actions and outlook on life.

## **Pressure to excel**

The most challenging part of my career has been, and continues to be, the need to multitask. As a faculty staff member, my primary roles involve a combination of teaching, research, and service. We are expected to excel in all three aspects, and there is no room for “average” performance. The pressure is immense.

## **Looking ahead**

People working in urban areas experience various work-related stressors, such as long working hours, high work pressure, work-life interference, and social maltreatment, to name a few. I will continue to investigate the organizational- and individual-level factors that enable employees to flourish and clarify the underlying mechanisms of this process. Through disseminating research findings to the general public and engaging the practitioners, I wish to promote job satisfaction and well-being among employees across organizations and industries.