

## Construct, Measurements and Antecedents of Thriving at Work

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**Abstract:** *Thriving at work was defined as the continuous psychological state in which individuals experienced both a sense of vitality and learning to measure employees' state. Thriving at work which can gauge individuals whether they were on a positive developmental path had a positive meaning not only for employees but also to the Organization. The study summarizes the origin and development of various conceptualizations of thriving at work, and analysis the dimensions and measurements were, then discussed the antecedents identified in recent studies, and finally forecast for future research prospects after neatening the current status of theory and research on thriving at work.*

**Keywords:** *Thriving at Work, Measurements, Antecedents*

### 1. Introduction

The importance of thriving at work as a subjective positive state can be explained in both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, employees have better self-adaptation and healthier body who are thriving at work, and which have a positive significance not only for employees but also for organizations.

Employees' thriving at work will make better performance in the aspects of in-role behavior, organizational citizenship behavior, organizational identity, and out-of-role performance. Specifically, it can increase positive performance, such as job performance, job satisfaction and organizational loyalty, employees by 16%, 46%, and 32% respectively, and decrease negative performance, such as job burnout rate and absenteeism rate by 80% and 74% respectively than employees in the average state.

On the negative side, employees' thriving at work is highly susceptible to the environment as a subjective psychological state, so employees will be more susceptible to negative factors and more negative states if the organization does not measure and promote employees' thriving at work.

Nowadays, China is in a period of social transformation, and the factors such as the intensification of enterprise competition and the increase of work pressure easily make employees lose their thriving, even experience languishing at work represented by the phenomenon of "Buddha employees" and "mourning culture" popular in the Internet, and which not only affects the employees themselves, but also has a negative impact on the development of the organization.

Therefore, the study analysis the construct and measurement of thriving at work as well as the antecedent variables on the basis of previous research and to make organizations know more about the way employees thriving at work.

This has an important significance not only for specific individuals but also for organizations and enterprises both in theoretical research and practice.

### 2. Propose and Develop of Construct

With the Positive Psychology of Seligman and the active development of Positive Organizational Scholarship on this basis, how to improve employee psychology state effectively is not only the practical problem that the entrepreneur and the human resource expert pay attention to but also becomes the research hotspot which the psychologist and the management researchers pay attention to.

Work is a situation where a person will spend more and more time awake. Although the study of positive psychology in the field of psychology without considering situational factors, thriving at work emphasizes the organizational situation of work in particular as a construct of positive organizational management in the field of management.

Although there has been a lot of research on thriving and many scholars have made it clear that there is a need to develop and validate concepts to measure the extent of this positive state "clearly and effectively in

the workplace," there is no research focused on this area until Spreitzer proposes thriving at work. And most studies focus only on the state of employees that needs to be "Surviving to Thriving," but few studies focus on what thriving at work really means.

Spreitzer et al. (2005) put forward the construct of thriving at work for the workplace in this context based on the cross-domain literature analysis and constructive induction of thriving, combined with a large number of qualitative research.

At first, Spreitzer summarized the thriving of individuals in the workplace and defined thriving at work as the growth of positive capacity, and believed that when this growth occurs in work, it will produce positive results, mainly reflected in Vitality and complexity. Vitality is reflected in positive emotions, and complexity is reflected in the integration and growth of personal cognition. Then, Spreitzer defined thriving at work as a state in which individuals experience and feel both Vitality and Learning at work, which can effectively measure the performance and development of employees at work on this basis.

This definition includes not only the two aspects of vitality and learning but also emphasizes that both aspects must exist at the same time. Only when employees experience the vitality and learning at the same time, the employees are thriving at work, only one of them does not meet the criteria for thriving. If neither of them is experienced, the employees are in a state of languishing at work.

The concept of thriving work which includes two dimensions of vitality and learning is based on three reasons. Firstly, vitality and learning respectively reflect the emotional and cognitive aspects of the psychological development of subjective experience. Specifically, vitality reflects the emotional aspect, and learning reflects the cognitive aspect. Secondly, vitality and learning reflect the two basic psychological development viewpoints of hedonic and Eudaimonic respectively. Hedonism emphasizes the individual's experience of finding happiness, which is reflected in vitality. Eudaimonism emphasizes that individuals seek to realize their potential through learning. These two kinds of views also constitute two kinds of well-being in positive psychology including subjective well-being and psychological well-being. Thirdly, a large number of interviews show that vitality and learning are the basic requirements of the psychological development process in the qualitative study of thriving at work.

The research of thriving at work has promoted the development and integration of positive organizational management including positive organizational behavior and positive organizational scholarship. Such as Luthans et al. (2014), the founder of positive organization behavior, conducted an empirical study of the relationship between psychological capital and thriving at work. So thriving at work has become a new hotspot in the field of positive organizational management.

### **3. Dimensions and Measurements**

Although thriving at work and the prosperity of other disciplines are studied as a Reflective construct, the two-dimensional definition of thriving at work has been greatly recognized by other researchers compared with the definition, content, and dimension of the prosperity of other disciplines. Most of the current research on thriving at work basically follows Spreitzer's definition of the two dimensions of vitality and learning. Only a few scholars do not use two-dimensional definitions to thriving at work, such as Dutton et al. (2007) have defined thriving at work as a high-quality work relationship in their study of workplace prosperity. And Seitz (2009) defined it as four dimensions, including learning, vitality, energy, and connection, through the grounded theory of positive psychology coaching and thriving at work.

With the deepening of the research, empirical research has begun to appear on the basis of previous theoretical research. Therefore, the measurement of thriving at work has also achieved some results. At present, the measurement of thriving at work is carried out on the basis of the two dimensions of vitality and learning, and main measurement scale is also the measurement of the two dimensions of vitality and learning. Since research on thriving at work is not too long, there are three main measurement scales for thriving at work so far since the rise of research is not too long.

The first measuring scale is developed by Carmeli and Preitzer (2009) in the study of trust impact on thriving at work through the mediation effect of the link, and then positively affects innovation. The scale uses a total of 11 items, of which 3 items are used to measure employees' experience of learning at work, such as: to what extent, you can learn something new at work. The remaining eight items are used to measure the energy and vitality that employees feel at work, such as I feel positive and energetic at work. The scale uses the Likert 5-point scoring method, from "1" for "completely disagree" and "5" for "full agreement." The scale items can be illustrated by two first-order factors of vitality and learning after factor analysis, and The reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.94. However, the two items among all three items of the measurement of learning are mainly related to the context of life, such as: to what extent, what you learn at work can help your life, or to what extent, what you learn at work can make your life flourish. Therefore, measuring scale is not a good indication of the two dimensions of thriving at work of individuals experience and feel both vitality and learning at work at the same time in general.

The second measurement scale is developed by Niessen and Sonnentag et al. (2012) in a diary study of thriving at work. There is a five-day diary study which was conducted on 121 employees three times a day and collected 478 diary data. Participants were asked to record their access to work resources in the morning, to report agent work behavior at noon, and to measure their vitality and to learn at night. For the measurement of thriving at work, the scale uses a total of 10 items. There are 5 items are used to measure the vitality which is selected from Shirom-Melamed (2003) Physical Activity Measurement Scale (internal consistency coefficient between 0.94 and 0.97), and was revised in conjunction with the research. For example, I can still feel energetic when I get off work. There are another five items are used to measure the learning and development that employees feel at work. These five items are selected from the Sonnentag (2003) learning scale and are also revised in conjunction with the research, such as "I like the difficulties faced at work today, and let me learn new abilities by challenging them." Likert's 5-point scoring method was also used in the scale. The reliability coefficient of combining activity and learning for a single factor was 0.85. It can be proved that thriving at work a continuous and unified state innovatively through the research with a diary study. However, it is not scientific and rigorous from the perspective of the development of the scale itself because the steps of pre-testing and modifying of the items lack in the development of the scale.

The third measurement scale is developed by Porath and Spreitzer et al. (2012), which is the most widely used scale in the current work of empirical research because it followed the general steps of scale development. The study included three small studies that empirically examined the relationship between thriving at work and a range of outcome variables. It is developed a measurement scale in the first part of the study following the general steps of the scale development. The study first identified 25 items, of which 10 items were measured for vitality. Seven items were selected from the subjective vitality scale of Ryan (1997) such as I felt energetic and spiritual. In addition, the author developed three reverse item of vitality, such as I lack vitality. It did not use the previous learning scale for reference in terms of measuring learning experience instead of 14 items self-developed such as I can feel that I am improving and improving. The main reason is that the former scale is quite different from the learning experience experienced by individuals when they are thriving at working, because it is basically biased towards learning as an objective criterion for improving performance, reflecting the differences between individuals and others or specific behavior. The remaining one item measures the overall feeling of the prosperous work. It is: I am really prosperous. This scale uses the Likert 7-point scoring method, from "1" to "7", which represent "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The measurement scale retained 10 items with higher correlation after deleting of items with a correlation coefficient of less than 0.40 through the data analysis of 30 employees of pre-survey in different occupations. Five of them were used to measure the vitality dimension (internal correlation coefficient was 0.40~0.77), and the other five items were used to measure the learning dimension

(internal correlation coefficient was 0.54~0.78), and each dimension had a reverse item. It was verified the reliability and structural validity of the measurement scale through the CFA test conducted by LISREL8 on 175 young students and 324 professional employees who entered the MBA in the formal investigation. And the two-factor model showed better fitting validity than the single-factor model, which showed the correctness of the two-dimensional division of the concept. The reliability and validity of the scale were also tested through the investigation of 276 blue-collar workers and supervisors, 335 employees in six industries and 136 EMBA employees in the second and third part of the study.

On the whole, the existing research is still in its infancy with regard to the dimensions and measurement of thriving at work. Moreover, it is needed cross-cultural exploratory studies for Porath's measurement scale to prove its effectiveness despite the authority and the breadth of its application, because thriving at work is easy to be influenced by context as a state and the scale is carried out in the western social context.

#### **4. Antecedents of Thriving at Work**

It is shown that thriving at work can bring positive results to individuals and organizations by more and more studies. Therefore, how to effectively promote employees' thriving at work through the study of the antecedent variable will become the focus of positive organizational management research. Thriving at work will be affected by external situation factors and self-internal factors since it is a psychological state instead of a psychological trait. Therefore, the study of the antecedent of thriving at work will carry out from two aspects of external situation factors and self-internal factors.

Spreitzer et al. (2005) formed a social embedding model on the basis of self-determination when she put forward the concept of thriving at work through a large number of reference to psychology and other related fields of theoretical and empirical results. The model proposes that the work unit contexts and resources produced in the doing of work as external situation factors affect the individual through situational mechanisms, and agency work behavior as self-internal factors is the engine of thriving. Furtherly, the work unit contexts and resources produced in the doing of work affects thriving at work significantly through the mediation of agency work behavior. Among the external factors, unit contextual features can reflect the employees move from one angle of the emotional support of the organization, mainly including decision-making discretion, broad information sharing and climate of trust and respect. The resources produced in the doing of work are mainly related to the resources for completing the work and related support of tools, mainly including knowledge, positive meaning, positive affective resources, and relational resources. The agency behavior of internal factors represents the impact of behavior as the engine of thriving, including work focus, exploration, and heedful relating.

Spreitzer et al. (2009) further proposed an integrative model of human growth at work, in which the main influencing factors of thriving at work are contextual enablers and self-determination. Contextual enablers as external situation factors include not only unit contextual features in social embedding model such as decision-making discretion, broad information sharing and climate of trust and respect, but also offer two additional antecedents of performance feedback and environmental volatility. Self-determination mainly includes a sense of autonomy, a sense of competence and a sense of relatedness. Similarly, contextual enablers play a positive role in thriving at work through the mediation of self-determinants significantly.

Scholars have also studied and demonstrated some other antecedents of thriving work, besides the antecedents of thriving at work concluded from the social embedding model and the integrative model of human growth at work, which is mainly include the work unit contexts, resources produced in the doing of work and unit contextual as external situation, as well as agency work behavior and self-determination as self-internal factors. In terms of external situation factors, some scholars have studied the positive impact of organizational climate factors, including organizational well-being, perceived supervisor support, perceived organizational support, workplace friendship, and the negative impact of the impolite interaction between employees on thriving at work. In addition, some scholars have also studied the positive influence of

leadership on thriving at work since which is an important influence force in the organization, such as authentic leadership, empowered leadership, and positive psychological coaching.

Table 1 External Situation Factors of Antecedents of Thriving at Work

<b>external situation factors</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>unit contextual features</b></li> <li>✓ decision-making discretion</li> <li>✓ broad information sharing</li> <li>✓ climate of trust and respect</li> <li>• <b>resources produced in the doing of work</b></li> <li>✓ Knowledge</li> <li>✓ positive meaning</li> <li>✓ positive affective resources,</li> <li>✓ relational resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>organizational climate factors</b></li> <li>✓ organizational well-being</li> <li>✓ perceived supervisor support</li> <li>✓ perceived organizational support</li> <li>✓ workplace friendship</li> <li>✓ impolite interaction</li> <li>• <b>leadership</b></li> <li>✓ authentic leadership</li> <li>✓ empowered leadership</li> <li>✓ positive psychological coaching</li> </ul>

In terms of self-internal factors, research of antecedent mainly focused on individual psychological factors, such as core self-evaluation, internal motivation, individual positive emotions, resilience, empathy, and psychological capital, as well as some research focused on the individual's ability including employee political skills and employment potential. In particular, it was integrated positive organizational management of positive organizational behavior and positive organizational scholarship for the empirical study of psychological capital indirectly impacted on thriving at work on the basis of distinguishing of the definition of the two constructs.

Table 2 Self-Internal Factors of Antecedents of Thriving at Work

<b>self-internal factors</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>self-internal factors</b></li> <li>• <b>agency behavior</b></li> <li>✓ work focus</li> <li>✓ exploration</li> <li>✓ heedful relating</li> <li>• <b>Self-determination</b></li> <li>✓ sense of autonomy</li> <li>✓ sense of competence</li> <li>✓ sense of relatedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>individual psychological factors</b></li> <li>✓ core self-evaluation</li> <li>✓ internal motivation</li> <li>✓ individual positive emotions</li> <li>✓ resilience</li> <li>✓ Empathy</li> <li>✓ psychological capital</li> <li>• <b>individual's ability</b></li> <li>✓ employee political skills</li> <li>✓ employee potential</li> </ul>

Chinese scholars have made contributions to the study of thriving at work although the construct of prosperous work has not been introduced into China for a long time. For example, Wu Jiangqiu et al. (2015)

studied job resources, and positive emotions have a significantly positive effect on thriving at work. Shi Kan et al. (2015) studied both core self-evaluation and perceived organizational support have significant positive effects on thriving at work; intrinsic motivation acts as a partial mediator not only between core self-evaluation and thriving at work but also between perceived organizational support and thriving at work. Han Yi et al. (2016) found that personal characteristics can significantly predict employees' thriving at work. Chen Hongan et al. (2016) tested that Workplace friendship significantly impacts on thriving at work through the mediation of psychological capital. Shen Lei et al. (2018) tested that authentic leadership significantly impact on thriving at work through the multiple mediations of perceived organizational support and psychological capital. It is helpful to understand the antecedent of thriving at work in different social situations, and effectively promote the research progress.

## 5. Conclusion and Prospects for future research

It will be very helpful to the research of thriving at work in different social situations. Through this study of construct, measurement and antecedents, especially the summary and analysis of the empirical study in the Chinese context. In addition, it provides a reference for the organization to better understand employees' thriving at work and to improve through practice.

In the future research, it is necessary to make a detailed study according to the age, region and even occupation of different groups of employees, and finally form a more targeted measurement scale. And specific development promotion strategy should be carried out according to the different proportion of distribution after large-scale measurement of the distribution of employees' thriving at work.

In addition, thriving is a subjective experience of a person's psychological state, so a person himself is the most aware of their own experience of work prosperity. Therefore, the longitudinal study can be carried out by employee self-awareness and summary record with the help of diary research method and other forms. It is useful to assess and analyze employees' thriving at work themselves by keeping a diary every day during a period of time. And it will be helpful to apply theoretical research to work practice better through deeply understanding of how to enter the state of thriving at work.

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