



Umbrella Summary

Thriving

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What is thriving?

Thriving is defined as “a positive psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work” (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005, p. 538). Vitality refers to feeling energized, and learning is about experiencing personal growth and development (Spreitzer et al., 2005). The most popular measure of thriving includes ten items, with instructions to think about the questions in relation to work (Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012). Examples of vitality items include, “I have energy and spirit” and “I feel alive and vital,” and examples of learning items include, “I am developing a lot as a person” and “I continue to learn more as time goes by.” Conceptually, thriving bears some resemblance to [employee engagement](#), which includes high levels of energy, labeled as vigor. Though they differ in other ways, these similarities are likely responsible for the very strong empirical relationships between the two concepts (Kleine, Rudolph, & Zacher, 2019).

Why is thriving important?

Thriving is important because it is associated with many job attitudes, stress indicators, and behaviors. More specifically, thriving is strongly related to job satisfaction and organizational and team commitment (Kleine et al., 2019). With respect to stress indicators, thriving is moderately associated with various types of work stress and strongly related to burnout; employees who thrive at work are less likely to experience stress and burnout (Kleine et al., 2019). In terms of behaviors, thriving has a moderate connection to both task performance and citizenship behaviors (Kleine et al., 2019), which are discretionary extra-role behaviors, such as such as volunteering, helping others, and making suggestions for improvement, that benefit the group and organization (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Thriving is moderately connected to turnover intentions, and the connection to actual turnover is unknown (Kleine et al., 2019).

What contributes to thriving?

Meta-analytic research on thriving thus far has focused on assessing factors that are merely associated with thriving, not on what factors cause thriving or what strategies can improve thriving. However, there are many factors that are associated with thriving that are seen as potential influences. These factors fall into two categories: individual and relational characteristics.

Several individual factors are strongly associated with thriving, including having a proactive personality (i.e., a tendency to take charge and show initiative), having a positive personality (a tendency to have positive feelings), and having a positive sense of self-worth and competence. Thriving is moderately associated with having a tendency to not experience negative emotions like fear, shame, or guilt. In short, there is reason to believe that dispositional differences in employees may, in part, be responsible for differences in their odds of thriving at work.

Nonetheless, there are relational factors that are also connected to thriving, suggesting that situational factors may also play a role. Thriving is strongly related to having perceptions of organizational support, a high-quality relationship with a supervisor, and mindful and civil interpersonal relationships at work. In a similar vein, thriving is moderately related to experiencing trust, supportive and empowering supervision, and supportive coworkers. Overall, positive experiences related to coworkers, supervisors, and the organization show strong connections to employees' likelihood of thriving at work.

QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Thriving is strongly related to job satisfaction and organizational and team commitment.
- ▶ Thriving is moderately associated with various types of work stress and strongly related to burnout; employees who thrive at work are less likely to experience stress and burnout.
- ▶ Thriving has a moderate connection to both task performance and citizenship behaviors.
- ▶ Thriving is moderately connected to turnover intentions, and the connection to actual turnover is unknown.
- ▶ Several individual factors are strongly associated with thriving, including having a proactive personality, having a positive personality, and having a positive sense of self-worth and competence.
- ▶ Overall, positive experiences related to coworkers, supervisors, and the organization show strong connections to employees' likelihood of thriving at work.
- ▶ Practitioners or researchers that would like to assess thriving should consider the scale developed by Porath et al., (2012).

References

- Chiaburu, D. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2008). Do peers make the place? Conceptual synthesis and meta-analysis of coworker effects on perceptions, attitudes, OCBs, and performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93*, 1082–1104.
- Kleine, A. K., Rudolph, C. W., & Zacher, H. (2019). Thriving at work: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 40*, 973–999.

Porath, C., Spreitzer, G., Gibson, C., & Garnett, F. G. (2012). Thriving at work: Toward its measurement, construct validation, and theoretical refinement. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 33, 250–275.

Spreitzer, G., Sutcliffe, K., Dutton, J., Sonenshein, S., & Grant, A. M. (2005). A socially embedded model of thriving at work. *Organization Science*, 16, 537–549.

Author(s)

Megan Paul, PhD, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Suggested Citation

Paul, M. (2020, November 11). *Umbrella summary: Thriving*. Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development. <https://www.qic-wd.org/umbrella/thriving>

For more information about the QIC-WD, visit qic-wd.org or contact: Michelle Graef, Project Director, at mgraef1@unl.edu.

This Summary was developed with funding from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Grant #HHS-2016- ACF-ACYF-CT-1178. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the funder, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the US Department of Health and Human Services.