

# Influence of Thriving on Innovative Behavior at Workplace

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*The purpose of the present study is to advance the literature on thriving by examining its influence on innovation in organizations. The study posits positive linkage between employee thriving and innovative behavior at workplace. The authors adopted the survey method to test the hypotheses. Data was collected from a sample of 223 employees working in service sector. As hypothesized, results suggest that the experience of thriving at work leads to employees engaging in innovative work behavior. The results also suggest that amongst the two dimensions of thriving i.e. learning and vitality, learning opportunities is a better predictor of innovative work behavior.*

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## Introduction

Work constitutes a very important aspect of an individual and society's life. It is demonstrated by the fact that a significant amount of time of an individual's life is spent at the workplace and work also contributes greatly to the socio-economic development of any society (Harpaz, 1990). Despite the importance of work, research shows that work is a major contributor of stress (Sonnentag & Frese, 2003). However, work can also be a major source of thriving of an individual (Niessen et al., 2012). Thriving refers to psychological state wherein individuals experience positive energy and learning. Opportunities to thrive at work leads to positive outcomes. Past research has shown that thriving is an important antecedent to employee health and well-being (Shirom et al, 2008; Spreitzer et al., 2005), performance (Carmeli et al., 2009), leads to organizational citizenship behavior (Porath et al., 2007) and thriving also stimulates pro-activity at work (Ashby, Isen & Turken, 1999; Carmeli et al., 2009). Studies also show how experience of thriving can reduce burnout of an individual (Maslach, 2003).

Innovation is one of the key strategies identified by business organizations to improve firm performance in the ever changing competitive environment (Han, Kim & Srivastava, 1998; Weerawardena, O'Cass & Julian, 2006). Past studies have investigated the influence of leadership (Yidong & Xinxin, 2013) and organizational climate (Oldham & Cummings, 1996) on innovative work behavior. Innovation is not part of the institutionalized system of practices (Janssen, 2005) hence organizational members who are change averse and are committed to existing processes (Dougherty & Heller, 1994; Kanter, 1988) would neither themselves engage nor encourage innovative behavior in the organization. Hence it is an interesting question to find out what leads individual members to engage in innovative work behavior. The objective of this research is to find out the linkages between thriving and innovation and also to study the dimensions of thriving (vitality) and learning and its influence on innovative behavior at workplace. The study contributes to the field by examining how employee experience of vitality and learning opportunities stimulate employees to engage in innovative behavior at workplace.

### Thriving

Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein & Grant (2005:538) defined thriving as "the psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work". Individuals who experience thriving feel alive and energetic about their work and feel they are growing because

of the learning opportunities (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Thriving is a temporary psychological state and not an enduring disposition (Chaplin et al., 1988).

The two essential conditions of thriving are vitality and learning. Vitality refers to feeling of energy and aliveness (Nix, Ryan, Manly & Deci, 1999). Learning refers to opportunity for growth and development by acquiring required skills and competencies. Thriving is closely linked to personality growth and hence a continuous process and not a onetime activity (Ryff, 1989). Vitality without learning does not lead to thriving as it would not provide opportunities for the individual to flourish. While, learning without vitality shall not lead to positive outcomes as the individual might not be motivated to exhibit newly acquired competencies at work place (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Thus, thriving includes both affective (vitality) and cognitive (learning) aspects of psychological state (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

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Thriving is not a dichotomous state where an employee either experiences thriving or not. Instead, it is a continuous experience where an individual may experience less or more thriving. Sonenshein (2005) conducted a qualitative study which captured both vitality and learning dimensions of thriving. Spreitzer et al. (2005) developed a socially embedded model of thriving at work place which

is based on the assumption that individuals thrive in the context of the situations in which they are placed. It is based on two dimensions of work i.e. the contextual features of the work unit and the resources which are produced while doing the work. The model explains how the contextual factors of the work (decision making discretion, information sharing, climate of trust and respect) leads to agentic work behavior (task focus, exploration, heedful relating) which leads to thriving at workplace. Further, the agentic behavior of the individuals produces resources (knowledge, positive meaning, positive affective resources, relational resources) which again leads to experience of thriving. The model also explains how experience of thriving at work leads to positive outcomes such as healthy adaptation to work environment leading to positive development of the individual.

There are other constructs which are similar to the concept of thriving such as those of flow, engagement and subjective wellbeing (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Niessen et al., 2012; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Flow is defined as “a subjective state of people when they are completely involved in something to the point of forgetting time, fatigue, and everything else but the activity itself” (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993: 59). Flow leads to an intense involvement in the activity at hand (Schuler, 2012). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) defined engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption. Vigor refers to high level of energy and dedication and signifies

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enthusiasm and pride. Absorption is characterized by fully involved in ones work. Subjective well-being is defined as the “phenomena that includes people’s emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction” (Dieber et al, 1999). Subjective well-being is a broad area which includes moods and emotions and cognitive evaluation of domain satisfaction and life satisfaction. The common thread which binds thriving with flow, engagement and subjective wellbeing is the vitality dimension of thriving. However, thriving is different from these constructs in that unlike thriving the other constructs do not have the dimension learning. Hence, individuals can experience flow, engagement or wellbeing without learning experience; while thriving isn’t complete without learning (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

### **Innovative Work Behavior**

Innovation has been widely used as a strategy by organizations to improve their products, services, procedures and processes (Aldrich, 1999; Jack & Anderson, 2002; Shane, 2008). Creativity and innovation are sometimes used interchangeably (Basadur, 1997) but they are different constructs. Creativity connotes development of novel ideas (Mumford and Gustafson, 1988) while innovative behavior goes a step further to

implementation of these novel ideas (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Innovation leads to either creation or radical redesign of existing products, services or services (Woodman, Sawyer & Griffin, 1993). Thus, innovation is aimed towards adding value to the organization

De Jong (2006:19) defined innovative work behavior as “individuals’ behaviors directed toward the initiation and intentional introduction of new and useful ideas, processes, products, or procedure within a work role, group or organization”. Process of innovation involves three stages i.e. generation, promotion and application of novel ideas to improve organizational performance (Janssen, 2005). At each stage of this innovation process organizational members can engage in innovative behavior (Yidong & Xinxin, 2013).

In order to positively encourage innovation at workplace, Jong and Hartong (2007) developed an inventory of leaders’ behavior which influences employees’ innovative behavior at the workplace. Inventory included behavior such as innovative role-modeling, intellectual stimulation, stimulating knowledge diffusion, providing vision, consulting, delegating, support for innovation, organizing feedback, recognition, rewards, providing resources, monitoring and task assignment.

### **Thriving & Innovative Work Behavior**

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Spreitzer, 2009). Thriving constitutes affective (vitality) and cognitive (learning) aspects of psychological state. When individuals experience positive moods and emotions, it builds social and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2002) which would help them to engage in improving work processes. Positive moods and emotions affect cognitive thinking by expanding thinking faculty to come up with creative problem solutions, which would further help individuals to be more innovative. Opportunity to learn and develop at workplace helps individuals in multiple ways. Learning helps employee to gain expertise in their work (Amabile, 1998) and also to hone new skills. Thus, learning helps employees to try out new things, improve existing processes and practices and demonstrate creative behavior (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009) which would ultimately result in innovation in the organization. Wallace et al. (2013) found that employees who experience thriving at work would be willing to engage in innovative behavior. Based on the discussion, following hypotheses were developed:

H1: Thriving will lead to innovative behavior in the organization.

H2: Vitality will lead to innovative behavior in the organization.

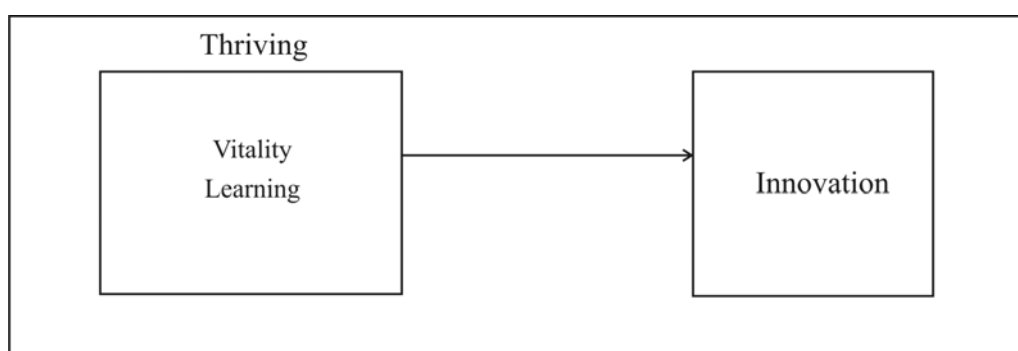
H3: Learning will lead to innovative behavior in the organization.

## Method

Survey data was collected from 223 employees from service industry. 71 percent participants were males and had a mean age of 51 years. 64 percent were postgraduates with 45 percent having less than 10 years of work experience.

Thriving was measured by the 8-items adapted scale developed by Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson and Garnett (2012). Innovative work behavior was measured by a 4-items scale developed by Denson et al. (1995). The responses for both the scale were captured on Likert scale. Fig. 1 shows the research model.

**Fig. 1 Research Model**



## Analysis

The results were analyzed using SPSS version 16. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test value of 0.88 and 0.84 of thriving and innovation scale respectively indicates that sampling is adequate and factor analysis can be carried out (Tables 1 & 3). Thriving scale showed two dimensions of thriving i.e. vitality and learning. It explained 70.7 percent of cumulative variance (Table 2). The 4-item scale of innovation showed one

dimension (Table 4) and it explained 70.7 percent of cumulative variance.

**Table 2 Factor Analysis of Thriving Scale**

Factor Variance	Vitality	Learning
% of variance	58.05	12.66
Cumulative variance %	58.05	70.7

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

**Table 1 KMO & Bartlett's Test for Thriving Scale**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.			0.88
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square		985.17
	df		28.00
	Sig.		0.00

**Table 3 KMO & Bartlett's Test for Innovation Scale**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.			0.84
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square		491.20
	df		6.00
	Sig.		0.00

**Table 4 Factor Analysis for Innovation Scale**

Factor Variance	Innovation
% of variance	75.11
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
Rotation not possible as there is only one factor available	

**Table 5 Reliability Analysis**

	Cronbach's alpha	No. of Items
Thriving	0.896	8
Innovation	0.889	4

**Table 6 Correlations between Variables**

	Learning Mean	Vitality Mean	Thriving Mean	Innovation Mean
Learning Mean	1.00			
Vitality Mean	0.59(**)	1.00		
Thriving Mean	0.88(**)	0.90(**)	1.00	
Innovation Mean	0.65(**)	0.55(**)	0.67(**)	1.00

N=222; \*p≤0.05, \*\*p≤0.01, \*\*\*p≤0.001

**Table 7 Regression**

Critrion Variable		Predictor Variable		
		Beta	t value	R2
Innovation	Thriving	0.88	13.45***	0.45***
Dimensions of Thriving				
Innovation	Vitality	0.62	9.89***	0.30***
Innovation	Learning	0.65	12.64***	0.42***

N=222; \*p≤0.05, \*\*p≤0.01, \*\*\*p≤0.001

## Discussion

It is said that organizations who see and act upon the opportunities and possibilities for change through innovation in the current volatile and uncertain business environment will not only survive; they will successfully compete and flourish

Table 5 reports the reliability of thriving and innovation scale. The alpha values are high(0.80) in both the scales (Nunally, 1978). Table 6 shows the correlation between all the variables. It shows that innovation is correlated with thriving and both the dimensions of thriving i.e. vitality and learning.

Table 7 reports the regress analysis. The results show that thriving significantly influence innovation ( $R^2 = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Both vitality ( $R^2 = 0.30$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and learning ( $R^2 = 0.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) dimensions of thriving significantly influence innovation.

ish in the face of the emerging adverse and fluctuating business and economic conditions<sup>1</sup>. Innovative changes require organizations to rethink how they perceive

<sup>1</sup>8 reasons why innovation is important to businesses today <http://www.imagination.com.au/innovation-blog/8-reasons-innovation-important-businesses-today/> aced on 10th May, 2017



and sense customer's needs, wants and expectations and how they adapt to an increasingly connected and digitized world. This brings focus on innovative behavior of employees. Innovative work behavior was defined by De Jong (2006) as individuals' behaviors directed toward the initiation and intentional introduction of new and useful ideas, processes, products or procedure within a work role, group or organization. It's a complex work behavior consisting of generation, promotion and application of new ideas intended in the work role, group or organization which aims at improving organizational performance (Janssen, 2000; 2005).

Innovative behavior involves being willing and competent in adapting and in knowing how to think differently. The purpose of the study was to advance the literature on thriving by examining its influence on innovation in organizations. We posited positive linkage between employee thriving and innovative behavior at workplace. Thriving was the independent variable and innovative work behavior was the dependent variable. The two essential conditions of thriving are vitality and learning. Vitality refers to feeling of energy and aliveness (Nix, Ryan, Manly & Deci, 1999). Learning refers to opportunity for growth and development by acquiring required skills and competencies. Thriving is a continuous process and not a onetime activity (Ryff, 1989). Thriving is not a dichotomous state where an employee either experiences thriving or not. Instead, it is a continuous experience where an individual may experience less or more thriving (Sonenshein, 2005).

Consistent with the findings of previous research (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Wallace et al., 2016) we found that thriving at workplace explained innovative behavior of employees ( $R^2 = 0.45$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This supports the first hypothesis.

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Vitality at work closely aligns with the idea of intrinsic motivation which has often been studied as a key element in relation to creativity (Amabile, 1996) and innovation (Anderson et al., in press). However, according to Sonenshein, Dutton, Grant, Spreitzer & Sutcliffe (2006) thriving is distinct from intrinsic motivation in that although thriving may at times be derived from a desire to perform a behavior based on the affective enjoyment of the behavior itself (i.e., vitality), at other times the impetus for thriving has been described by emphasizing personally important achievement and recognition goals (i.e., learning). In our study vitality explained innovative work behavior ( $R^2 = 0.30$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This supports the second hypothesis.

Thriving is self-regulatory in nature because it allows employees to gauge whether their work behaviors are providing personal development in a positive direction (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein & Grant, 2005) and leading to the process of learning. This brings us to the compo-

nent of learning in the construct of thriving. In our study learning explained innovative work behavior ( $R^2 = 0.42$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This supports the third hypothesis.

### Limitations & Future Directions

The study was primarily cross sectional in nature. More insightful results can be drawn from longitudinal study. Longitudinal investigations would also provide an opportunity to examine the reciprocal nature of thriving and innovation to determine the role that successful innovation plays in subsequent thriving at work and vice versa, testing the suggestions by Spreitzer et al. (2005) thriving operates through a continuous feedback loop to resources that enable future thriving. The study has not taken into consideration the contextual factors which can act as antecedents (for example passion and creative self-efficacy) or moderators (e.g., job complexity), and mediators (e.g., job satisfaction) that could account for important variance in innovation. Finally, leadership style is a particularly important contextual factor that could be explored to expand our findings. Just as transformational leadership has been related to subordinate creativity (Shin & Zhou, 2003) and employee need satisfaction (Kovjanic, Schuh, Jonas, Quaquebeke & Dick, 2012), supportive leadership styles (e.g., authentic leadership, ethical leadership) might further enhance the motivational benefits stemming from a high employee involvement climate and, thereby, promote thriving and innovation in the workplace.

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