

The Experience of Thriving at Work for Managers in the Private
and Public Sector

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I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been
submitted for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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ABSTRACT

Thriving at work is a concept that has been influenced by a range of perspectives, including the thriving as a response to trauma and concepts of wellbeing, flourishing and happiness. The most influential theory of thriving at work in the extant literature as a combination of learning and vitality has informed a series of studies leading to a conceptual framework of antecedents, behaviours and outcomes. This thesis contends that thriving at work may differ across roles and explored the experience of thriving at work for managers in one public and one private sector organisation in the UK in order to understand their perceptions of cultural and individual factors that influence this experience. An integrated literature review identified the theoretical foundations of this debate, as well as critical questions to be addressed in this study, and informed the choice of a qualitative inquiry and a social constructivist paradigm. Semi-structured interviews incorporating the critical incident technique were carried out with 30 managers, and retrieved data was analysed using template analysis. This analysis identified three themes: trust as a foundation of thriving at work; making a difference as generating thriving at work; and the iterative, cumulative and emotive nature of thriving at work. The responses amplify the importance of immediate context, compared to broader cultural and demographic influences. Furthermore, the priority and weighting given to each factor varied significantly by individual, suggesting thriving at work is more personal than has been captured by current definitions and theories. A re-examination of the theoretical determinants of thriving at work suggests psychological safety and meaningful work could offer greater insight into the phenomenon for managers, and a new paradigm is proposed that reflects this theoretical position whilst placing greater emphasis on the individual nature of the concept.

(291 words)

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Summary

This PhD aims to explore managers' experiences of thriving at work. An integrated review of the extant literature revealed that this phenomenon may contribute to outcomes such as employee performance, innovation and retention, whilst being influenced by factors associated with relationships and responsibility for meaningful work. However, understandings of the concept remain fragmented in focus, undermining effective consideration of its nature and implications in the workplace. The literature review conducted for the purposes of this research demonstrated that the concept has been informed in a limited way by qualitative inquiry (Sonenshein, Dutton, Grant, Spreitzer, & Sutcliffe, 2013). It also highlighted the dominance of the positivist and post-positivist paradigm and quantitative methodologies in exploring the topic. As a result of the dominance of this research paradigm, it could be argued that the theoretical foundations of the concept have not been appropriately informed by an understanding of the experienced phenomenon. This was therefore an opportunity to generate insight that could offer "new and more nuanced ways of understanding traditional positive phenomena" (Maitlis, 2017, p. 319) and challenge some of the fundamental assumptions of the extant literature.

This study sought to explore these critical areas for further research and redress this methodological imbalance through the use of semi-structured interviews, to understand how thriving at work is experienced by managers in two different organisations. An analysis of participants' responses identified three

integrative themes: mutual trust as a foundation; making a difference as a generator of thriving at work; and the experience as an upward spiral that is cumulative over time with evaluative and emotional components. This analysis also suggests that broader social factors, such as organisational culture, are not as influential as the more immediate context and the emphasis on putting the person at the centre of the inquiry (Hefferon, Ashfield, Waters, & Synard, 2017), also illuminated the individual nuances within the data. This insight informed a critical evaluation of the definitions and theoretical determinants in the extant literature, and offered the opportunity for an alternative conceptualisation for managers.

1.2 Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

This research seeks to contribute to understandings of thriving at work, by exploring how managers in two different organisations experience it. The objectives of this research are, therefore, to:

- Explore how individual managers describe the experience of thriving at work.
- Examine the contextual and individual factors managers identify as necessary to ensure thriving at work.
- Explore how organisational culture and demographic differences may influence thriving at work.

These objectives are captured in the following research questions:

- How do participants describe the experience of thriving at work?
- Are the descriptions of the experience of thriving at work affected by demographic factors or the nature of the organisation?

1.3 Research Design

The majority of existing research on thriving at work is situated within the field of positive organisational scholarship (POS), which is concerned with “positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of organisations and their members” (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003, p. 5). A recent review of this topic did not reference a single qualitative study of the experience of constructs such as empowerment, resilience, gratitude, psychological capital, positive relationships and positive leadership (Mills, Fleck, & Kozikowski, 2013). This review did not claim to be exhaustive or systematic, but still, this example highlights the overemphasis placed on quantitative methodologies within current scholarship on POS (Cameron et al., 2003). In order to redress highlighted imbalances within the existing research field, and to ensure an experiential perspective, this study was designed within the constructivist research paradigm and deployed a qualitative methodology. Managers from one public and one private sector organisation were invited to take part in a semi-structured interview to explore their experiences of thriving at work. The interview guidelines provided a series of open questions to explore the areas for inquiry identified within the extant literature. Demographic information was also collected, and the interview made use of the critical incident technique (CIT) to recall a time at work when respondents perceived themselves to be thriving (Chell, 2012). Responses were analysed using a thematic template approach in order to identify themes, compare the responses of participants from different organisations or demographic groups, and address the objectives of this study (King, 2012a).

In this thesis, the term *positive* is used to differentiate between the exploration of phenomena that contribute to emotional and behavioural outcomes

that could be considered beneficial, and those that minimise or alleviate the undesirable or uncomfortable. The research design took account of the danger inherent in using this term of assuming the experience itself must be pleasurable. This assumption, for example, could lead to a simplistic, unbalanced perspective that does not reflect “a more nuanced approach to the notions of positive and negative” (Ivtzan, Lomas, Hefferon, & Worth, 2016). Indeed, focusing on the positive may not only create bias in inquiry and analysis, but also, as both positive and negative experiences have the potential to contribute to wellbeing, thriving and flourishing, an overemphasis on seeking the positive may have a detrimental effect on respondents (Held, 2004; Wong, 2011). The use of CIT in this study, for instance, allowed participants to describe times when they were experiencing challenges yet found they were thriving at work. Respondents also described the contrast between thriving and not thriving at work, suggesting perhaps that one could not exist without the other (Resnick, Warmoth, & Serlin, 2001). The responses of the participants reflect the dichotomy that most experiences that are of value consist of both negative and positive components, but nonetheless have the potential to lead to personal growth and fulfilment (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998; Ivtzan et al., 2016).

1.4 Focus of Research

1.4.1 Research context.

This study aims to contribute to existing understandings of the positive aspects of employment, through the exploration of managers’ experiences of thriving at work. Most larger employers in the UK offer programmes to reduce stress and difficulties associated with mental illness (Giga, Fletcher, Sgourakis, Mulvaney, &

Vrljan, 2018; Health and Safety Executive, 2012; Kelloway & Barling, 2010). As well as reducing negative stressors for employees, this has been seen as a way of enhancing organisational commitment and engagement, and improving individual and organisational performance (Biron, Cooper, & Bond, 2009; Richardson, 2008). This study focuses on thriving at work in order to better understand the concepts that contribute to a more positive experience of work, so that they may provide new perspectives on how to improve individual wellbeing, which would be of interest to both employees and organisations alike (Cole, Daly, & Mak, 2009). This emphasis on the positive experience of work also resonates with a plethora of literature on the psychological benefits of working and the harmful effects of unemployment (Clark & Oswald, 1994; Cole et al., 2009).

This research presupposes that thriving at work is a construct worthy of further study. This assumption bears some scrutiny as very few of the empirical papers in the integrated review explicitly challenge it. This lack of criticality has been recognised as a limitation in a meta-analysis of POS as the “association of positivity with uncritical science” (Chow, 2016, p. 6). It could also be argued that *thriving* is a general term and exemplifies a trend in the field of POS towards a lack of specificity in constructs, with the recognition that “the lack of precise language to explain POS phenomena has led to an impoverished understanding of that which is good, elevating, and life-giving in organisations” (Cameron & Caza, 2004, p. 735). Some critics also suggest that constructs which evolved from this more positive bias are no different to those from other perspectives that pre-date them, such as the absence of stress or burnout, engagement or job satisfaction (Lazarus, 2003).

Conversely, the extant literature does suggest that thriving at work is different from other similar constructs and, while fragmented, there is empirical evidence to support its role in creating outcomes of interest to organisations. However, the criticality suited to the chosen constructivist research paradigm and a non-assumptive stance was reinforced by the focus on both reflexivity and positionality that is particularly important in the context of the study of the positive (Gough, 2017). As a consequence, it was important to consider the possibility that no consistent interpretation would be identifiable from this study, or that any interpretation that was reached would not be distinct or unique.

A growing body of literature has explored general wellbeing, incorporating the constructs of flourishing, happiness, resilience, thriving and life satisfaction (Cole et al., 2009; Diener, 2000; Huppert & So, 2013; Masten, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff, 1995; Scheier & Carver, 1992; Seligman, 2003; Su, Tay, & Diener, 2014; The Government Office for Science, 2008). Scholarship on positive experiences in the workplace, however, is limited (Cameron et al., 2003), although thriving at work is one construct that has received some attention (i.e. Boyd, 2015; Liu & Bern-Klug, 2013; Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014). Apart from a small number of studies that loosely characterise it as doing well or being happy (Prosser, Tuckey, & Wendt, 2013; Sumsion, 2004; Wendt, Tuckey, & Prosser, 2011), the dominant definition describes the combination of two sub-constructs – vitality and learning (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). This dominant definition was informed by a qualitative study of individuals' experiences of progressive self-change at work, which the authors of the study later construed as thriving at work (Sonenshein et al., 2013; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Subsequent research

has sought to measure, validate and identify antecedents and outcomes of this construct, rather than to explore its relationship to the lived experience (i.e. Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Gkorezis, Kalampouka, & Petridou, 2013; Paterson, Luthans, & Jeung, 2014).

1.4.2 Current understanding of thriving at work.

In order to understand how the current conceptualisations of thriving at work relate to the experience of managers in a real world setting the theoretical assumptions that underpin the extant literature must be identified. A critical evaluation of the findings and the theoretical positions within the extant literature identified three such assumptions. Firstly, inherent in the exploration of thriving at work thus far is an assumption that personal growth is a fundamental characteristic of the concept. The definition of the construct as a combination of vitality and energy, for instance, is situated in self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000), social cognition theory (SCT) (Bandura, 2001) and self-adaptation theory (SAT) (Tsui & Ashford, 1994). SDT proposes that human beings pursue the conditions of autonomy, competence and relatedness in order to foster personal growth. This theory emphasises individual intrinsic motivation and agency in creating these conditions. Similarly, SCT emphasises the agentic behaviour that allows an individual to adapt and respond in order to grow, and reinforces the importance of social comparison and social interaction in this context. Finally, Tsui & Ashford's (1994) theory of self-adaptation, proposes that we evaluate our situation in order to respond and react in ways that ensure growth.

Secondly there is an assumption that thriving at work is primarily a social construct, where context becomes a significant factor. This is treated in two ways

within the existing literature. Those that have taken a broader definition of doing well, for example, have situated their study within particular work environments that are assumed to have had an impact on the ability to thrive (Prosser et al., 2013; Wendt et al., 2011); whilst others have explicitly focused on the social aspects of work that may have an influence on this ability (Conway & Foskey, 2015; Travis, Lee, Faulkner, Gerstenblatt, & Boston, 2014; Gerstenblatt, & Boston, 2014). Nonetheless, the impact of both the broader cultural context of the organisation and the characteristics of the work itself, independent of the social constructs around it, are not clearly understood, and are therefore of interest to this study.

Thirdly, theories informing thriving at work could be considered as “universal” perspectives, aiming to inform our understanding of general human behaviour. There appears to be an implicit assumption within the extant literature, that there may exist a single construct that describes this experience for everyone, regardless of gender, age, experience or managerial responsibility, which has limited the exploration of the differences that may be attributable to these factors. Indeed, these factors have been explored only within a small number of studies (Hennekam, 2017; Porath et al., 2012). In particular, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of managers’ experiences, proposing that they are a distinct population in this context. The quest for universality and the lack of workplace specificity in the theoretical foundations thus far, has evidently limited appreciation of the diverse nature of the experience of work itself. An individual who is engaged in cognitively challenging tasks, with high levels of accountability and inter-dependencies in a large organisation, has a very different experience of work than a craftsman or plumber working on their own. It therefore seems reasonable to

suggest that a number of factors contribute to the ability to thrive at work, how individuals experience it and the outcomes it is associated with.

To date, only one study has examined managers for their experiences relating to thriving at work. Although this did not find any significant correlation to level of responsibility in the workplace, the authors themselves suggested that this initial finding was based on a limited sample, maintaining that this link is worthy of further study (Porath et al., 2012). Other studies have looked at specific populations within the workplace, such as childcare workers or maintenance engineers (Travis et al., 2014; Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens, & Smith, 2016), but no study has sought to directly compare employees from two different organisations.

Looking beyond the literature on thriving at work, the study of managers as a distinct group, is supported by an examination of the more substantial literature on workplace stress. Both concepts are concerned with the individual's state of mind in the context of work, and much has been written about the different experiences of stress for managers and non-managers. The seminal Whitehall study challenged the conventional wisdom of the time and suggested that those in higher grades in the civil service experienced less stress than those in more junior posts (Marmot et al., 1991; Marmot, Rose, Shipley, & Hampilton, 1978), and a more recent study showed similar results, with lower levels of stress-related hormones and reported anxiety among managers than non-managers (Sherman et al., 2012). There is also an argument to suggest that a focus on how managers thrive at work may be beneficial for those they supervise. Emotional contagion theory, for example, suggests that the emotions of the leader will influence the team (Barsade, 2002), and studies have shown that when a manager experiences high levels of stress, which causes them to

display negative emotions, the team perceive that leader to be less effective (Gaddis, Connelly, & Mumford, 2004; Lewis, 2000). Given this picture, it seems likely that the experience of thriving among managers may also be different from that of non-managers, and that the impact may be significant for those that work for them.

This thesis argues that these three assumptions have led to a conceptual and empirical emphasis on growth and learning, social context and universality, at the expense of individual perspectives and differences and characteristics of the work itself. This is not to suggest that these factors are not valid foci, but the exploration of different theoretical perspectives informed by the individual experience of the phenomenon may challenge some of these assumptions and thus develop understanding even further.

Overall, this study aims to revisit and critically evaluate the concepts and assumptions of thriving at work, in the hope that future research can be informed by lived experience, and that conceptual clarity might be improved. This endeavour could be considered as a contribution to the development of “critical positive psychology” that seeks to address the potential antipathy between the critical and positive perspectives (McDonald & O’Callaghan, 2008, p. 138).

1.5 Overview of this Thesis

An integrated literature review follows this introduction, providing an opportunity to systematically trace thriving at work through the existing literature and explore it in depth (Callahan, 2010). The rationale for this approach, the methodology deployed, and the description of the literature included, will be presented in the next chapter, followed by an analysis of the theories,

methodologies, measurements and findings that shape the focus of inquiry for this study.

The identification of the appropriate paradigm to meet the research objectives is described in Chapter 4 and ensures that these underlying assumptions are explicit and create a “coherent worldview” that guides how “reality can be known and understood” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 19), which in turn guides the research design, methods and ethical choices of this study (Allsop, 2013; Bryman, 2012, Chapter 3).

Integrative themes that reflect the participants’ experiences of thriving at work are explored in Chapter 5 and consideration is given to the influence of organisational culture and demographic characteristics. A series of general observations from the interviews also provide a context for the discussion that follows in Chapter 6. It will be argued that aspects of this analysis are not captured, or contradict, some of the assumptions that inform the extant literature, and theories of psychological trust and meaningful work are more suitable theoretical constructs in which to situate the insight generated by this research. A theoretical model of thriving at work for managers, informed by the experience of the participants, and encompassing these theoretical perspectives, is then proposed.

In the final chapter, the limitations of this study are examined, before areas for further research and implications for practice are discussed in the context of this new model.

1.6 Concluding Remarks

This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of thriving at work for managers by exploring it through the lens of personal experience. The qualitative methodology is intended to generate insight into shared perceptions and individual differences, and the inclusion of managers from two very different organisations is to enable the examination of the social nature of the construct. While it was not assumed that it is a unique or valid construct, the participants can describe with clarity their experience of it and recognise it as both distinct and valuable. Furthermore, the differences that might be attributed to groups of individuals based on the organisation they work for or a demographic characteristic appear to be nuanced rather than substantive. The themes identified and the conceptual framework proposed, will, therefore, provide opportunities to enhance both organisational performance and individual wellbeing for managers in many different contexts.

Chapter 2 – Approach to the Literature on Thriving at Work

2.1 The Purpose and Scope of the Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to integrate diverse perspectives within the extant literature on thriving at work, in order to identify the themes and limitations that will inform both the focus of inquiry and the methodological approach of this research. In his discussion of literature reviews, Hart (2018) distinguishes between the interventionist and the scholastic, describing the purpose of the latter as to “look for and resolve contradictions, challenge propositions and make inferences”, rather than to use evidence to make decisions in response to a specific situation (Hart, 2018, p. 93). The scope of the review, therefore, includes the findings of relevant empirical studies, and the methodologies and theoretical perspectives that have informed the extant scholarly research.

2.2 The Integrated Literature Review

The integrative literature review is a systematic approach to the literature that is particularly suited to the purpose and scope previously identified. Whittemore and Knafl (2005) create a distinction between meta-analytical, systematic and qualitative and integrative literature reviews. Other classifications exist and the distinctions are not clear cut (Hart, 2018; Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009), but this categorisation clarifies the suitability of each approach for a given purpose. The authors suggest that meta-analysis is most suited to the review of primary studies, making use of statistical methods to combine different data, whereas systematic reviews can combine quantitative and qualitative evidence to inform practice, and policy and qualitative reviews focus on creating new theoretical frameworks by

developing narratives or themes across qualitative studies (Boaz, Ashby, & Young, 2002; Higgins, Altman, & Sterne, 2011; Whitemore & Knafl, 2005). The integrative review serves to integrate the literature on a particular topic, both empirical and theoretical (Callahan, 2010; Evans, 2007; Hopia, Latvala, & Liimatainen, 2016) and “play an important role in stimulating further research on the topic” (Torraco, 2005, p. 364), reflecting the purpose of this literature review in encouraging further scholarship on the experiences of managers in terms of thriving at work.

It has been suggested that the integrated literature review is a useful tool in the study of management sciences and human resources, given the focus on practice within this scholastic tradition (Callahan, 2010; Torraco, 2005, 2016). Such reviews have examined subjects such as disengagement at work (Rastogi, Pati, Krishnan, & Krishnan, 2018) and the mechanism between leadership and engagement (Carasco-Saul, Woocheol, & Taesung, 2015). In his discussion of the value of integrated literature reviews to the field of human resource development, Callahan (2010) suggests they are particularly suited to the exploration of a specific, or narrow, concept in depth and Torraco (2005) also advocates the use of this approach when addressing new, emerging topics that will benefit from a holistic review. Thriving at work is both a narrow (when compared to broader concepts such as stress or engagement) and a relatively new concept, suggesting it is a suitable candidate for such a review.

2.3 Literature Review Methods

There is broad agreement that a precise method that follows a recognised structure, is an essential feature of an integrated literature review, and serves to

reduce bias and minimise potential limitations (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015; Hopia et al., 2016; Russell, 2005) and this integrated literature review is presented following the five stages suggested by Whitemore and Knafl (2005). Firstly, the purpose is clearly defined, then details are provided on how the review was conducted. Secondly, relevant material is identified, analysed, synthesised and reported. Thirdly, the methodological quality, value and representativeness of the available empirical studies are evaluated. The purpose of this review is described in the previous section and the next two stages are contained in the remainder of this chapter. Fourthly the theoretical origins, definitions, findings and methodologies that have so far been presented in the extant literature on thriving at work are critically analysed before the final (fifth) stage that synthesises the associated strengths and contributions of the literature, as well as the areas of conflict, omissions, problems and weaknesses. This analysis and synthesis is presented in the next chapter and informs the key questions that guided the more specific focus of inquiry in support of the aims and objectives of this research.

2.4 The Literature Search

Given the purpose and scope of the review, a set of search terms was developed to identify all relevant academic literature that focused on this specific phenomenon. The search of the literature was designed to identify all theoretical and empirical studies that form our understanding of thriving at work.

Early in the investigation, it became clear that the search would need to be focused and specific. A search of four of the main electronic databases (PsycINFO, Academic Search Ultimate, MEDLINE and Business Source Complete) with the

keywords of *Engagement* and *work* resulted in 21,298 articles; *stress* and *work* provided 95,312 articles; and *thrive* and *work* 2900 articles. These four databases were chosen to ensure coverage of different research domains, incorporating the business and organisational disciplines and the health and psychological perspectives. Subsequently a search with the keywords *thrive* and *work* on each database, in turn, led to the exclusion of MEDLINE from the analysis. Of the 314 papers identified in this search, all were concerned with the medical definition of thriving (linked to healthy physical development or recovery from illness or injury), rather than an exploration of a more general construct and in the context of work. Therefore, academic papers for possible inclusion in the literature review were identified by using the search strategies described below in Table 1.

In developing the protocol for this integrated literature review, an initial exploration of the grey literature was carried out by searching the most commonly used non-academic search engine, Google, using the term *thriving at work*. The results contained the academic papers already identified but yielded nothing of further academic merit. Many of the results were directed either towards self-help articles that referenced the extant research or no research at all, or consultancies offering services to help people thrive at work. While some advocate the inclusion of such literature in integrated literature reviews (Hopia et al., 2016) and reviews of management and organisational science (Adams, Smart, & Signmud Huff, 2017), Cullinan (2005) identified the limitations of inclusion, in particular the absence of peer review and the inability to assess if the literature found is in any way representative. It has been argued that relatively new concepts are likely to be characterised by fragmented knowledge and inconsistent use of language, constructs

and binding theories (Burgess, Singh, & Koroglu, 2006), which can only be amplified by the dynamic and somewhat unpredictable nature of non-academic search engines (Adams et al., 2017). As a result, and supported by the identified purpose and scope, the decision was made not to include such material.

Table 1. Search Strategies Deployed in this Integrated Literature Review

Database	Search terms	Combined with
PsycINFO	thriv*, work	All fields
	thriv*, work, employ*	Abstract
	thriv*, employ*	Abstract
	thriv*	SU
	thriv*, work	SU
Academic Search Ultimate	thriv*, work	All fields
	thriv*, work, employ*	Abstract
	thriv*, employ*	Abstract
	thriv*	SU
	thriv*, work	SU
Business Source Complete	thriv*, work	All fields
	thriv*, work, employ*	Abstract
	thriv*, employ*	Abstract
	thriv*	SU
	thriv*, work	SU

Note. All searches deployed the additional filter of Journal Article and Peer Review.

The most recent execution of the search protocol was August 20th, 2019, and identified 4,247 candidate articles to be considered for inclusion. The process and criteria by which the literature to be included in the review was finalised is described in Figure 1. A long list of 332 articles was created in line with this procedure, which included 207 duplicates, and the resulting 125 articles retained after initial screening of the title and abstract can be found in Appendix A. A paper focused on the ability of an organisation (rather than the employees within it) to thrive under employee

ownership illustrates the application of the exclusion criteria at the title/abstract screening stage (Brent, 1996). The articles finally included in this literature review were identified using criteria developed iteratively, as each research paper was examined in full for relevance to the study of thriving at work. If a paper did not appear to be relevant, the reason for this was identified and a new criterion created. This was then applied to all the articles previously selected for inclusion and all future articles. Hart (2018) supports this iterative approach, describing the methodological approach to the integrated literature review as “a less prescribed, more iterative process” (Hart, 2018, p. 101).

The final criteria were intended to be as objective as possible but did require some judgement on behalf of the researcher. The overall objective of the study and the methods deployed were considered, to ascertain if each paper was attempting to understand the concept of thriving at work. Sixty studies were excluded on the basis that that the term *thriving* was used in service of some other phenomena, as illustrated by a study concerned with the development of a wellbeing scale that could be used in the workplace whereby the term was used interchangeably with the term *well-being* (Stewart-Brown et al., 2011). Nine studies were excluded because they did not focus specifically on the workplace. An example of one paper excluded on this basis considered the ability of participants to thrive after trauma, and compared individuals working as flying squad police, to a different population working in a food manufacturing company (Norlander, von Schedvin, & Archer, 2005). On first inspection, this appeared to be a study of thriving at work, but closer examination revealed that the question was much broader, and the trauma was one experienced in life, not necessarily work.

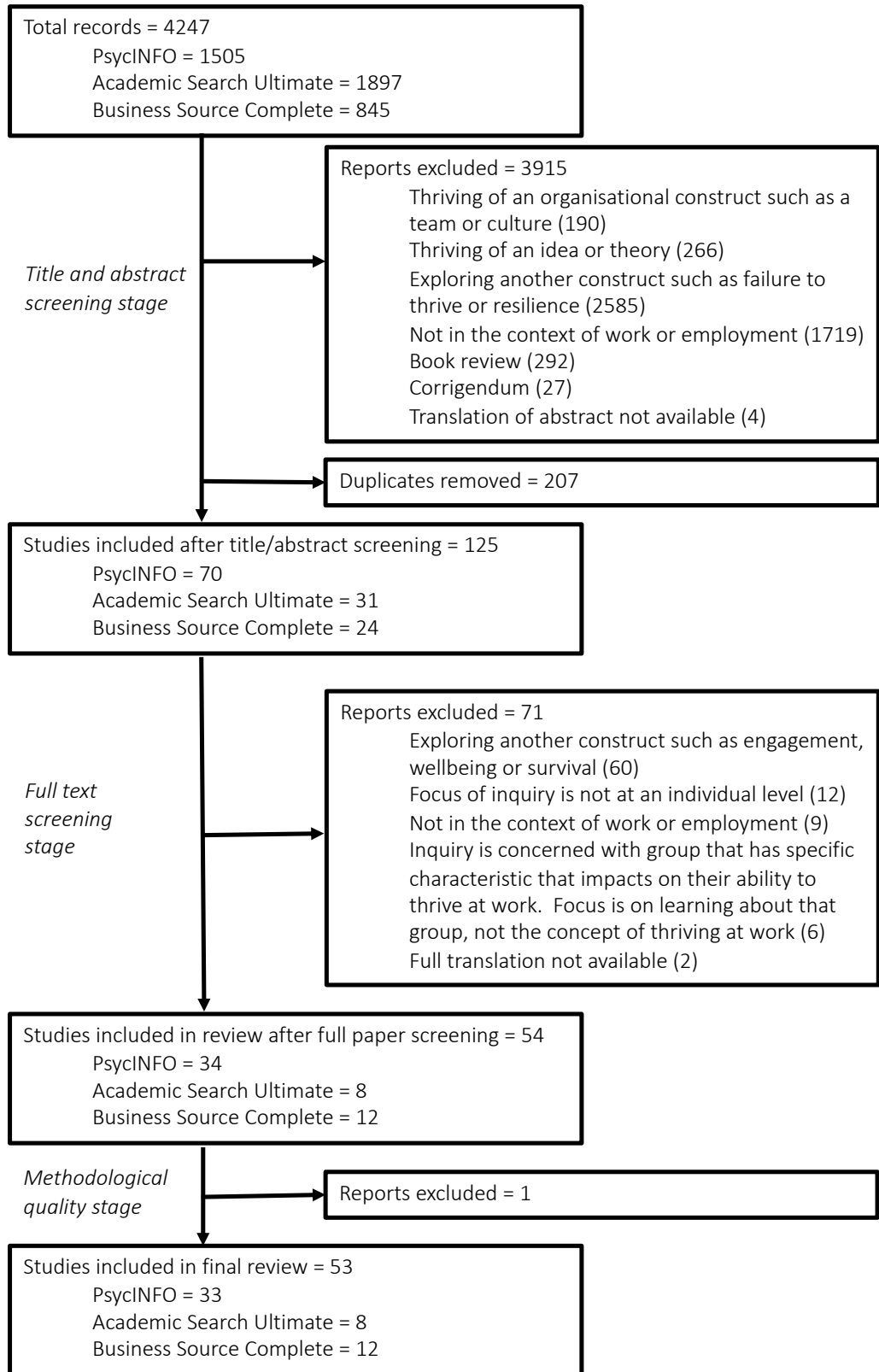


Figure 1. Flow of studies for an integrated review of thriving at work.

Finally, the quality of the research identified was assessed using the Mixed Methods Assessment Toolkit (MMAT) (Hong, Fàbregues, et al., 2018). The rationale and application of this approach are described in further detail in the next section but, given the scholarly intent of this review, studies that met none of the criteria for methodological quality were excluded from the final body of literature to be considered (Pace et al., 2012). This led to the exclusion of one paper that described a hermeneutic analysis of a novel for themes relevant to thriving at work (Yadav, Kohli, & Yadav, 2017).

2.5 Characteristics of the Studies Selected for Inclusion

The protocol identified above led to the inclusion of 53 articles in this review. A summary of this literature is presented in Appendix B and the pertinent characteristics of each paper are provided.

The 53 papers included in this integrated literature review were published between 2004 and 2018, although 49 were published from 2012 onwards, and appeared in 36 different journals representing the psychological, organisational and management disciplines. Although the papers were published across this diverse range of disciplines, 50 of the 53 papers either introduced or built on the conceptual model of thriving at work as vitality and energy that originated in the Centre for Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS) at the University of Michigan. The methodologies of seven of the studies were qualitative in focus, although five of these already assumed the theoretical perspective offered by colleagues from POS; six were theoretical, one used mixed methods, one was a meta-analysis and the remaining 38 were quantitative and deployed cross-sectional or time-lagged surveys.

Of the 39 studies that therefore required a specific measure, 33 used some or all of the 12-item scale developed by Porath et al. (2012), with only six using other measures. The size and scale of the studies varied, in part due to methodological differences, but even within the quantitative tradition, the sample size ranged from 31 to 920.

The 46 empirical studies included here focused on working adults and, although nine of the studies were based on US populations, the remaining 37 came from a broad range of countries including Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sweden and Turkey. Several sectors and professions were also represented in the literature, including workers from health, social care, education and business. The quality review of these papers that follows suggests that the specificity of each sample is a limitation of each study but, taken as a whole, the breadth of the samples incorporated in the extant literature has the potential to enhance the validity and reliability of the overall findings.

Finally, a review of the aims and objectives of the studies suggests that all sought to explore the antecedents of thriving at work or identify outcomes of interest to organisations, and in some instances, both. Most studies investigated the relationship to a specific concept and, as a result, a wide range of constructs are examined in this context. Examples of antecedents explored in this body of literature include psychological capital, organization support, psychological safety, team justice, incivility, supervisor pro-social motivation and models of leadership such as authentic, transformational and servant-based. Outcomes that receive attention are also varied and include innovation and creativity, intention to leave and helping behaviours.

2.6 Assessment of Quality

The assessment of quality is a crucial element of an integrated literature review, as the inclusion of diverse methodologies can lead to “superficial and incoherent data evaluation and data analysis” (Hopia et al., 2016, p. 663) and the opportunity for bias based on the reviewer’s own beliefs poses a potential threat to validity (Russell, 2005). In their review of integrated literature reviews, Hopia et al. (2016) also found quality appraisal was not consistently applied and suggested there is a need to “make the quality appraisal of the primary sources more coherent and systematic” (Hopia et al., 2016, p. 668). In response to this call to action, an assessment of quality was incorporated to exclude empirical studies that did not meet the quality criteria, and to provide an additional perspective from which to analyse the extant literature.

A tool to assess quality across a range of methodologies was required to optimise the rigour of the assessment, and avoid the challenges inherent in the diversity of criteria and scoring mechanisms created by separate assessments for each methodology (Crowe & Sheppard, 2011; Sirriyeh, Lawton, Gardner, & Armitage, 2012). The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) provides a set of criteria with associated guidelines to assess qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods studies (Hong, Fàbregues, et al., 2018; Pluye, 2013) and has been used in many mixed-methods systematic reviews across a range of disciplines (Chalfont, Milligan, & Simpson; Gledhill, Harwood, & Forsdyke, 2017; Humphries, Stafinski, Mumtaz, & Menon, 2014). The tool includes two screening questions which preclude non-empirical studies, such as reviews and theoretical papers (Hong, Fàbregues, et al., 2018). As a result, six theoretical discussion papers and one meta-analysis were not

included in this quality assessment, but they have been considered in the overall analysis and synthesis in order to explore their influence on extant research. Indeed, the inclusion of both empirical and theoretical papers is considered by many to be a defining feature and represents “the hallmark of this type of review” (Callahan, 2010; Evans, 2007; Hopia et al., 2016, p. 662; Whitemore & Knafel, 2005). These papers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Theoretical Discussion and Review Papers Excluded from the MMAT

Authors	Title
Boyd (2015)	Introducing thriving at work to the field of community psychology.
Carmeli and Russo (2016)	The power of micro-moves in cultivating regardful relationships: Implications for work–home enrichment and thriving.
Kira and Balkin (2014)	Interactions between work and identities: Thriving, withering, or redefining the self?
Kleine, Rudolph, and Zacher (2019)	Thriving at work: A meta-analysis.
Prosser, Tuckey and Wendt (2013)	Affect and the lifeworld: Conceptualising surviving and thriving in the human service professions.
Spreitzer, Porath and Gibson (2012)	Toward human sustainability: How to enable more thriving at work.
Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein and Grant (2005)	A socially embedded model of thriving at work.

The subsequent questions are specific to the methodology and require a response of *yes*, *no* or *can't tell*. One study met none of the criteria relevant to the methodology (Yadav et al., 2017) and was excluded from the scope of this literature review in line with recommendations made by the creators of the tool (Hong, Gonzales-Reyes, & Pluye, 2018; Pace et al., 2012). Beyond this rationale for exclusion, the authors suggest the response to the questions specific to the methodology should not create a score to be treated as objective numerical data,

but provide an opportunity to thematically describe and analyse the quality of the studies as a context for any discussions of the literature (Pace et al., 2012). The results of the MMAT analysis are presented in Appendix C.

The quality assessment suggests that conclusions generated about the findings in this body of literature should be treated with some caution. Most of the quantitative studies did not provide information on how the sample reflects the target population, and sampling processes were often pragmatic in nature, with four studies making use of the snowball technique (Frazier & Tupper, 2018; Russo, Buonocore, Carmeli, & Guo, 2018; Zhao et al., 2018) and others focusing on specific organisations known to the researcher. Some studies did frame the research question in the context of the specific nature of the sample, as seen in the study of Greek academics' intentions to migrate during the financial crisis, by Gkorezis, Bellou, and Petridou (2016), but many seek to contribute to the overall research question posed by considering a specific group and identifying this specificity as a limitation of the study. An example of one such study explores the relationship between high performing work systems and thriving at work. The research question and hypothesis development are situated in a context that does not reflect a particular geography or culture, but the sample is taken from a population of three provinces in China (Zhang et al., 2018).

Studies were still considered to have met the relevant criteria if the sample created a sub-set of the overall population of interest and identified the limitation, but also contributed to our understanding of thriving at work. This could be considered as a strength of the literature overall if consistent themes emerge from

the study of specific groups, and this will be discussed further in the analysis of the literature that follows.

The final point to note that emerged from this assessment of the quality of the literature was the absence of specificity in terms of methodologies. This lack of specificity often resulted in a response of *can't tell* in the MMAT. Given the literature is presented in peer-reviewed journals with a limited word count available to the author, it is possible that such specificity exists, but it cannot be assumed. Within the qualitative tradition, many authors did not provide detail on how the data was analysed, limiting the reader's understanding of how the data informed the findings and interpretation. Within the quantitative tradition, this lack of specificity was most prevalent in the absence of information on the comparison between the sample and the target population as previously discussed, and information on non-respondents. In many instances the risk of non-response bias was mitigated by the high level of response achieved, but still reflects the caution needed in assumptions of generalisability already identified (Hong, Fàbregues, et al., 2018; Li, Liu, Han, & Zhang, 2016; Porath et al., 2012).

The limitations reported by authors should be treated with caution, but it is worth noting that most studies (39 of the 46 papers analysed in the MMAT) did identify limitations within their research, and also support the limited generalisability of the findings across both the qualitative and quantitative traditions.

2.7 Approach to Analysis and Synthesis of the Literature

Initially, the literature was reviewed to identify the different conceptual definitions of thriving at work within the literature and the theoretical models that

influenced them. This discussion provides a context for the critical analysis of the extant literature that represents the fourth stage in the integrated review, and incorporates an examination of both the methodologies and the findings of the studies included in the review (Callahan, 2010). Firstly, themes were identified that captured convergence across the findings of the empirical studies. These themes were generated through a process of clustering the studies that examined related constructs in order to identify a narrative within this group of findings. Secondly, the different methodologies used in this body of literature were considered and patterns identified that could inform the understanding and appreciation of the nature and quality of the conclusions to be drawn from the findings.

While the analysis above focused on understanding the areas of convergence and cohesion in the extant literature, the synthesis focused on the gaps, opportunities and inconsistencies within the extant literature (Torraco, 2016). The key findings from this final stage of the integrated literature review process informed both the methodological approach to this inquiry and the specifics of the research agenda (Callahan, 2010). This analysis and synthesis are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 – A Review of the Literature

This chapter highlights the theoretical origins that have informed this body of literature and created the foundational assumptions on which the dominant definition of thriving at work as a combination of vitality and learning is built (Spreitzer et al., 2005). The methodological approaches and the findings within the literature are then analysed and synthesised, providing a research agenda that is discussed in the context of the research questions that have informed this thesis.

3.1 The Theoretical Origins of Thriving at Work

An integrated review provides the opportunity to identify the critical theories and concepts within the broader literature that have influenced the specific topic under scrutiny (Callahan, 2010). Thriving at work is a relatively new concept in the study of how employees experience work, with the first research appearing on the topic having been conducted by Sumsion (2004). However, thriving as a more general concept has received attention in many other fields of research – health, youth development, adult development, organisational studies and economics. The most influential theory of thriving more broadly within this body of literature was developed by Carver (1998) in the field of youth development. This not only forms the theoretical foundation of one study directly (Sumsion, 2004), but also informs the concept of thriving at work as developed by a group of researchers from the Centre for Positive Organizational Scholarship at the University of Michigan, that in turn provided the definition used by 42 of the remaining 44 studies studied for the purposes of this literature review. Carver (1998) suggests that, in response to an adverse event, there are four possible outcomes: succumbing, survival with

impairment, resilience (defined as recovery to the previous state) and thriving. This model is captured in Figure 2, representing thriving as a response to a negative or adverse event, that is more than just recovery to a previous state, but results in an individual functioning at a higher level than before. Implicit in this definition are two fundamental assumptions about thriving: it is in response to adversity, and that it involves some form of personal growth.

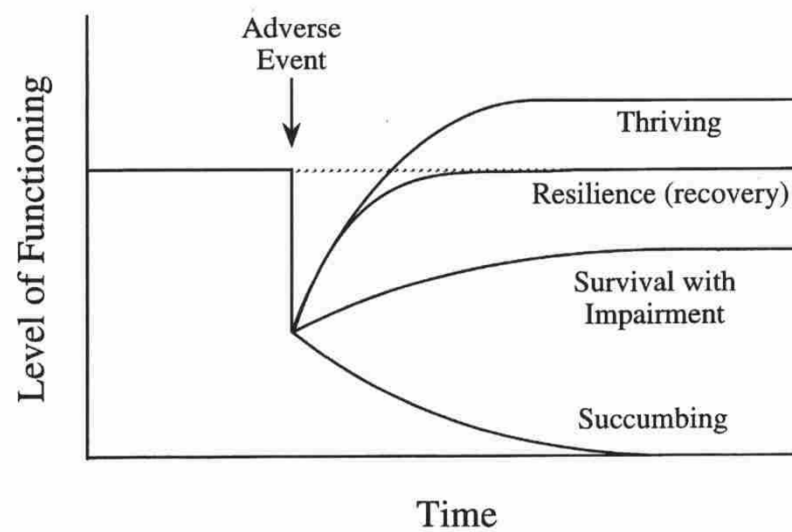


Figure 2. A theoretical model of resilience and thriving (Carver, 1998).

Specific studies of thriving at work among populations exposed to trauma, such as counsellors (Ling, Hunter, & Maple, 2014), and social workers (Wendt et al., 2011), incorporate these two assumptions and situate thriving at work in the concept of post-traumatic growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998). The majority of studies are not focused on trauma or adverse events, but retain the idea of growth taken from Carver's (1998) conceptualisation. They distinguish thriving from resilience by suggesting that adversity is not a necessary condition for thriving (i.e. Ren, Yunlu, Shaffer, & Fodchuk, 2015; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014; Spreitzer et al., 2005). This emphasis on growth is perhaps the most consistent theme across this literature, and

has led some to suggest that this is a distinguishing characteristic, particularly in relation to engagement and job satisfaction (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Liu & Bern-Klug, 2013; Niessen, Sonnentag, & Sach, 2012; Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, 2012).

3.2 Conceptualisations and Definitions of Thriving at Work

Within the literature on thriving at work, two distinct conceptualisations have emerged. The first does not clearly define it but infers it to be the same as doing well or being successful. The second encapsulates a more precise definition, learning and vitality, which has led to a body of literature focused on the development of measurements and support for this theoretical model (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

3.2.1 Thriving at work as doing well.

Three studies did not provide an exact definition of the concept, sharing the assumption instead that thriving involves *doing well* (Prosser et al., 2013; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014; Wendt et al., 2011). In these studies, what it means to thrive at work can be inferred from the attributes associated with those who are considered to be in that state. In Wendt et al. (2011), for example, those who are considered by the authors to be thriving are described as self-confident, wishing to be challenged in their work, and seeing themselves as positive role models. However, no consistent definition can be found in this subset of the literature.

3.2.2 Thriving at work as vitality and learning.

Researchers at the Centre for Positive Organizational Scholarship developed a theoretical model for thriving at work characterised by the two sub-constructs of vitality and learning (Spreitzer et al., 2005). The two factors capture both an affective aspect, described as the “positive feelings associated with energy and zest”, and a

cognitive aspect, “the acquisition and application of new knowledge and skills” (Paterson et al., 2014, p. 434). While each of these sub-constructs has received some attention separately, the work of Spreitzer and her colleagues suggests that there is a benefit to considering them together, as more favourable outcomes are achieved when both are present (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Porath et al., 2012).

The authors of this conceptual approach distinguish it from other constructs that describe a positive experience such as flow, flourishing or subjective wellbeing, suggesting that they do not capture the combined experience of both vitality and learning embodied in this definition. The state of total engagement described as *flow* (Csikszentmihaly, 2002), does not involve the experience of learning, and subjective wellbeing, defined as a positive evaluation of a person’s life (Diener, 2000), does not require the presence of both vitality and learning. The authors also create a distinction from the concept of flourishing which is defined as “positive feelings and positive functions in life” (Keyes, 2002, p. 207), suggesting this represents a much broader construct, even though both are concerned with “a positive state of human functioning” (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 258). Keyes (2002) posits that the opposite of flourishing is the absence of flourishing, or languishing, and Porath et al. (2012) reference this idea. This implication that the opposite of thriving at work is its absence or a state of languishing would seem to rule out the presence of another condition such as mental illness or stress. Spreitzer et al. (2005) go further and assert that thriving at work is not cultivated by decreasing the factors that cause stress, but by identifying and increasing those that contribute.

In this context, Spreitzer et al. (2005) propose a set of antecedents that are determined by the workplace environment (decision-making discretion, information

sharing and a climate of trust and respect) and the resources that are generated by the doing of work (knowledge, positive meaning, affect and relationships). They suggest that this combination of environment and resources leads the individual to engage in work behaviours that lead to thriving at work: focus on a task, exploration and heedful relating. Finally, the authors propose personal development and health as outcomes (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

This definition and subsequent conceptual model have built upon the existing theoretical perspectives of self-determination theory, social cognitive theory and self-adaptation theory. Taken together, these three theoretical perspectives inform a complicated model that describes antecedents, behaviours and outcomes as illustrated in Figure 3.

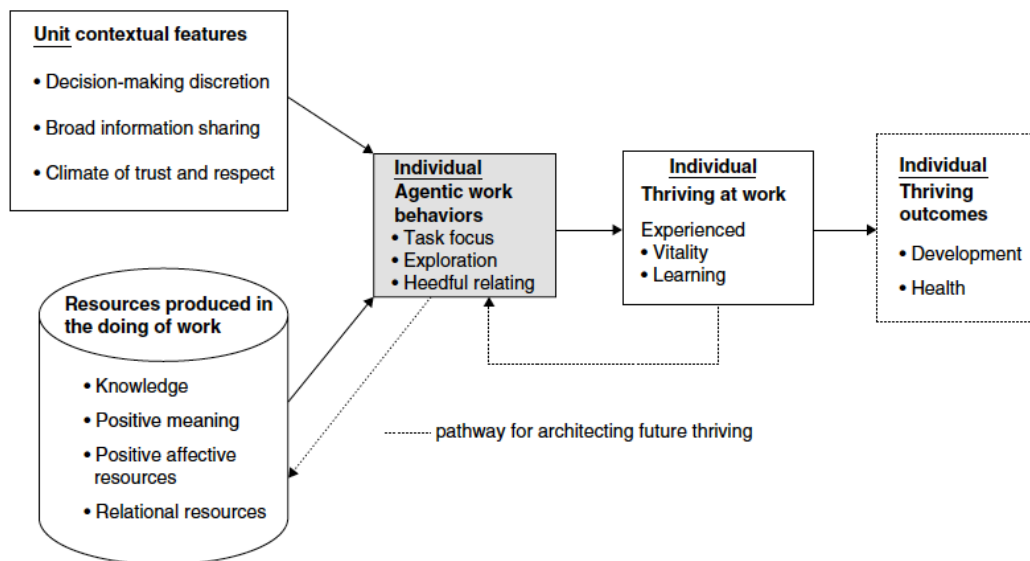


Figure 3. A conceptual model of thriving at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

a) Self-determination theory.

Spreitzer and colleagues ground their conceptual definition in self-determination theory (SDT) (Spreitzer et al., 2012; Spreitzer et al., 2005; Spreitzer & Porath, 2014). SDT is a theory of motivation that is internally directed (rather than externally coerced or controlled) and describes how individuals pursue conditions that foster their growth and development (Ryan & Deci, 2000). By situating thriving at work in the theoretical perspective of SDT, Spreitzer and colleagues are relating it to growth and development, and introducing the idea of agentic behaviour – the pursuance of conditions that will enable that growth. SDT identifies the conditions (or antecedents) for agentic behaviour that will lead to psychological growth and development (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These conditions of autonomy, competence and relatedness can be identified in the agentic work behaviours, as well as the individual and context antecedents, outlined in Spreitzer and colleagues' conceptual model (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

b) Social cognitive theory.

The importance of agentic behaviours is further reinforced by Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) references to Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory. Bandura (1994) describes agentic behaviours as the "capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one's life" (Bandura, 1994, p. 1), and suggests that for behaviour to be agentic, it must be intentional, planned, reactive, and based on self-reflection about one's current situation. Bandura (1994) also suggests that this process is inherently social, highlighting another feature of this definition. Spreitzer and colleagues (2005) describe it as socially embedded, in that it is about the social context as much as the individual (Boyd, 2015; Porath et al., 2012; Spreitzer et al., 2005). They go further

and suggest that the social context is of more interest, as it is both amenable to change and offers the opportunity to have an impact on more peoples' experiences of thriving at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005). As a result, there is an enhanced focus on the relationships, culture and social norms that promote it, rather than the abilities, capacities or traits of the individual.

c) Self-adaptation theory.

There is one further theoretical foundation to this definition of thriving at work that is significant and emphasises growth and development through agentic behaviour. Spreitzer et al. (2005) describe it as a phenomenon that allows for self-adaptation (Tsui & Ashford, 1994). The theory of self-adaptation describes such experiences as "desirable subjective experience that allows individuals to gauge whether what they are doing and how they are doing it is helping them to develop in a positive direction" (Spreitzer et al., 2005). This emphasises development and growth as a critical component of thriving at work, and positions agentic behaviour as a response to self-reflection, as it implies individuals take action to move in a positive direction within their own work life.

While growth has been identified as a characteristic of thriving at work across both the definitions in the extant literature, Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) definition clearly defines growth as developmental and adaptive, drawing on the theories of self-determination and self-adaptation. The experience is described as a combination of vitality and learning, defined as "the sense that one is acquiring, and can apply, knowledge and skills" (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 538). Taken together, these constructs create a "sense of progress or forward movement in self-development"

(Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 538) and serve as a “cue to assess progress” (Porath et al., 2012, p. 250).

Paterson et al. (2014) utilise the same definition, but also position self-development as an outcome, described as a series of behaviours that enable self-development, such as seeking feedback and engaging in developmental activities. Ideas around growth and self-development are identified as a theme within a number of qualitative studies exploring the factors associated with thriving at work, particularly when captured as professional development (Ling et al., 2014), commitment to on-going learning (Sumsion, 2004), experience and learning (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014) and training and learning (Conway & Foskey, 2015). However, in all cases, it is only one of many influential factors identified. Furthermore learning is positioned as an indicator of the experience of thriving by Spreitzer et al. (2005) but many of the qualitative studies suggest it is a contributory factor that enables it (Conway & Foskey, 2015).

The confusion identified in defining thriving at work, is exacerbated by the complexity of the model described by Spreitzer and colleagues’ theoretical discussion in 2005, and the fact that each study that has followed seems to possess an element of conceptual creep, adding to the theoretical model rather than refining or necessarily validating it (Cascardi & Brown, 2016; Haslam, 2016). Liu and Bern-Klug (2013), for example, add in constructs from work satisfaction, to create a conceptual model specific to nursing home managers. Kira and Balkin (2014) suggest authentic behaviour as a determinant, and introduce the concept of “withering” as the opposite of thriving. Paterson et al. (2014) integrate the concept of psychological capital into the model, and Travis et al. (2014) seek to integrate engagement into the

original concept and to create a new conceptual model with “three dimensions as factors germane to cultivating a thriving ... workforce” (Travis et al., 2014, p. 328). As Hackman (2009) has described when discussing this apparent conceptual creep, there is a danger that the concept of thriving at work becomes so inclusive that the unique nature of the construct so critical for it to stand the test of time, becomes blurred.

3.3 The Methodologies and Measurement of Thriving at Work

The work of Spreitzer and colleagues (2005) has been used by the majority of researchers as a starting point to either test or refine the conceptual model of thriving at work as learning and vitality (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Niessen et al., 2012; Paterson et al., 2014). A key enabler of this further study has been the development of a measure developed by Porath et al. (2012) that was used in 33 of the 39 quantitative studies included in this review and consists of a 10-item self-report scale provided in Table 3. As identified in the earlier quality assessment, this emphasis on self-report is a limitation of the literature more generally, although Porath et al. (2012) argue that self-report is the best method in this instance, given that the concept is an “internal gauge of a sense of growth and development” (Porath et al., 2012, p. 259).

Table 3. Thriving at Work Scale (Porath et al., 2012)

Learning items	I find myself learning often I continue to learn more and more as time goes by I see myself continually improving I am not learning (R) I have developed a lot as a person
Vitality items	I feel alive and vital I have energy and spirit I do not feel very energetic (R) I feel alert and awake I am looking forward to each new day

The scale includes five items from a pre-existing scale to assess the psychological state of vitality (Ryan & Frederick, 1997) but Porath et al. (2012) created five new items to capture the subjective experience of learning defined as a sense that one is acquiring new skills and knowledge. An initial confirmatory factor analysis showed that the items loaded on two separate latent factors described as vitality and learning and on a higher order construct of thriving at work (Porath et al., 2012). However, the more recent meta-analysis suggests that they are indeed distinct subdimensions but raised questions about the conceptualisation of learning that has informed this measure (Kleine, Rudolph, & Zacher, 2019, in press). The authors suggest that this conceptualisation of learning “neglects other potentially relevant dimensions such as personal growth, flourishing and self-actualization” and that the causal relationship between vitality and learning may not be clearly understood (Kleine et al., 2019, in press, p. 41). Overall, this discussion suggests that the measure reflects enough of the nature of thriving at work to be useful, but it may not fully represent the experience.

The literature on thriving at work is characterised by a focus on quantitative validations and refinement of the construct, and the measurement of outcomes,

based on the explicit assumption that it is defined as vitality and learning (Paterson et al., 2014; Porath et al., 2012). Studies that make use of a qualitative methodology do not typically aim to explore what it means to thrive, but instead assume the definition of learning and vitality, in order to investigate related research questions such as how to cultivate a thriving childcare workforce (Travis et al., 2014). Furthermore, this definition was informed by only one qualitative study of participants' experiences of progressive self-change at work (Sonenshein et al., 2013; Spreitzer et al., 2005). This underlying assumption has not been revisited by any of the later research, and yet a complex theoretical model of antecedents and outcomes has been built on this foundation.

The suggestion that this measure of thriving at work may only partially capture the experience is further supported by this over-reliance on a narrow definition and a focus on the development of a single construct that is assumed to be relevant and measurable to all within the positivist paradigm. It can therefore be argued that much of the existing literature has not truly explored these assumptions through a deeper understanding of how individuals experience it, and that this perspective would help "develop a richer theoretical perspective than already exists in the literature" (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012, p. 163) and to "grasp the very nature of the thing" (Creswell, 2009, p. 76). This concern is further exacerbated by the findings of the quality assessment of the extant literature, that suggests an absence of specificity in the descriptions of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The methods of analysis are not explicit beyond a general description, rendering it difficult to assess the rigour and validity of the findings. These conclusions informed the methodological choices that are discussed in Chapter 4.

3.4 Summary of the Findings of the Empirical Literature on Thriving at Work

The analysis of the findings within the extant literature enables an appreciation of how thriving at work is currently understood and informs the agenda for further research (Callahan, 2010). As previously identified, a broad spectrum of populations were studied within the empirical literature, and yet some consistency and commonality in the findings that can be captured in four themes: the role of the immediate supervisor in creating the environment that supports thriving at work, high-quality relationships at work, responsibility for meaningful work, and the influence on outcomes that are associated with organisational performance. The empirical papers that have informed each theme are provided in Appendix D.

3.4.1 The supervisor creates the environment for thriving at work.

The findings of 19 studies suggested that the person above an individual in the supervisory chain (described as a supervisor, manager or leader) plays a vital role in creating an environment where people thrive at work. Perceptions of supervisory support (Abid, Zahra, & Ahmed, 2015; Mushtaq, Abid, Sarwar, & Ahmed, 2017; Paterson et al., 2014), authentic leadership (Mortier, Vlerick, & Clays, 2016; Xu, Zhao, Li, & Lin, 2017), transformational leadership (Niessen, Mäder, Stride, & Jimmieson, 2017), servant leadership (Walumbwa, Muchiri, Misati, Wu, & Meiliani, 2018; Xu & Wang, 2019), high leader:member exchange relationships (Xu, Loi, & Chow, 2019) and family supportive supervisor behaviour (Russo et al., 2018) have been identified as either correlates or predictors of thriving. Paterson et al.'s (2014) study of the impact of supervisor support on thriving at work used structural equation modelling of data of 198 supervisor/employee dyads and strongly supported a relationship between the two. This is one of five studies that looked at either a dyad of

supervisor and employee or compared teams in the context of supervisory behaviour and therefore go beyond general perceptions of a good management to explore the influence of a specific relationship on the psychological state of thriving (Frazier & Tupper, 2018; Wallace et al., 2016; Xu & Wang, 2019; Xu et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2018).

Elsewhere in the literature, it is suggested that thriving at work may not only be influenced by styles of leadership, but that it may also explain how the leadership influences other outcomes. Five studies explored the theoretical hypothesis, based on the socially embedded positioning of the concept by Spreitzer et al. (2005), that if individuals are thriving at work, they are more likely to be influenced by a positive leadership style (Hildenbrand, Sacramento, & Binnewies, 2018; Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017; Li et al., 2016; Raza, Ali, Ahmed, & Moueed, 2017; Xu et al., 2017). This has been demonstrated in a range of studies which sought to examine its role as a mediator in the relationship between coaching and performance (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017), empowering leadership and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Li et al., 2016), transformational leadership and burnout (Hildenbrand et al., 2018), and managerial coaching and OCB (Raza et al., 2017). While care should be taken in interpreting these results given the cross-sectional or time-lagged nature of the research design, it seems likely that if an individual is thriving at work they are more likely to benefit from leadership styles designed to build trust, engage and drive performance. Xu et al.'s (2017) study provides one such example and investigated the role of authentic leadership on creativity among 80 teams in a manufacturing organisation in China (n=512), suggesting thriving is a "key mediating mechanism",

and concluding “an authentic leader can play an active role in boosting such thriving psychological states” (Xu et al., 2017, p. 493).

Alternative explanations for the relationship are possible and emotional contagion theory, for example, would suggest that the affective component of thriving could influence the supervisor’s behaviour (Barsade, 2002). There is, however, a consistency within this collection of studies that suggests, despite diversity of cultures, contexts and methodologies, that the role of the supervisor is influential, and behaviour that promotes a relationship of trust and respect between supervisor and employee is likely to support thriving at work. This perspective was supported by the results of Kleine, Ruldolph and Zacher’s (2019, in press) meta-analysis of 73 quantitative studies of thriving at work, which had previously identified that the relationship with the supervisors was a key antecedent, incorporating supportive leadership behaviour, empowering leadership and perceived organisational support.

3.4.2 High-quality relationships at work.

The second theme that captures findings from 18 studies is the importance of high-quality relationships, beyond the supervisor. While the meaning of *high quality* cannot be deduced from these studies, they provide indicators that supportive and constructive behaviour from colleagues are significant. In particular, psychological safety is construed as a predictor of thriving at work in three studies directly (Frazier & Tupper, 2018; Jiang, Hu, Wang, & Jiang, 2019; Yang, Li, Liang, & Zhang, 2019) and supported by an emphasis on connectedness and feeling part of a team (Gkorezis et al., 2013; Sumsion, 2004; Wallace et al., 2016), trust and respect (Carmeli & Russo, 2016; Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Travis et al., 2014), justice and fairness

(Bensemmane, Ohana, & Stinglhamber, 2018) and strong psychosocial bonds (Conway & Foskey, 2015). Other indicators of the importance of high-quality relationships at work include recognition of co-workers (Sim, Zanardelli, Loughran, Mannarino, & Hill, 2016; Sumsion, 2004) and it has been proposed that the extent to which others treat you well, may also be a contributing factor (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014). Conversely, workplace incivility and workplace violence may have a negative impact (Gkorezis et al., 2013; Zhao et al., 2018).

The breadth of behaviours explored does not facilitate conclusions about the relative importance of each, and causality cannot be assumed from any of the 11 quantitative studies. On the other hand the eight studies that used qualitative methods all reported findings related to high quality relationships with colleagues (Conway & Foskey, 2015; Hennekam, 2017; Ling et al., 2014; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014; Sim et al., 2016; Sumsion, 2004; Travis et al., 2014; Wendt et al., 2011). The methods deployed provided scope for participants to introduce topics for discussion (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003), and the findings suggest participants perceived relationships with colleagues to be an antecedent of thriving at work. In one such study Conway and Foskey (2015) explored how apprentices in Australia thrived. Their findings identified relating at work as a “central theme” incorporating ideas of social support systems, psychological safety and positive connections (Conway & Foskey, 2015, p. 337). The authors of this study, along with five others in this group of eight qualitative studies assumed the theoretical stance proposed by Spreitzer et al. (2005), which may have influenced both the research process and outcomes (Conway & Foskey, 2015; Hennekam, 2017; Ling et al., 2014; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014; Sim et al., 2016; Travis et al., 2014). However the semi-structured nature of the

interviews and focus groups, and the significance of the theme within each study supports the role of relationships experienced at work.

It is also important to recognise that there is a crossover between this theme and the last, as a number of the studies concerned with supervisory behaviour focus on creating an environment that supports high-quality relationships; where colleagues can collaborate, build trust and feel psychologically safe (Frazier & Tupper, 2018; Wallace et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2017). As for the preceding theme, the importance of high-quality relationships was also a feature of the meta-analysis, which identified workplace civility, heedful relating, supportive co-worker behaviour and trust, as antecedents of thriving (Kleine et al., 2019, in press).

3.4.3 Responsibility for meaningful work.

Fourteen studies considered the nature of the work itself, and a theme emerged that suggested that increased responsibility for an area of work is significant. In a qualitative study of trauma counsellors in Australia, for example, the authors proposed that thriving at work was facilitated in this challenging context by participants' sense that they were both helping individuals and addressing broader social issues, concluding "the challenges provided opportunities to engage in meaningful, valued and rewarding work" (Ling et al., 2014, p. 303). In particular, factors found to be important within these studies included freedom and decision-making discretion (Hennekam, 2017; Liu & Bern-Klug, 2013; Ren et al., 2015; Sumsion, 2004; Travis et al., 2014), meaningful work (Ling et al., 2014; Sim et al., 2016; Sumsion, 2004; Wendt et al., 2011), the appraisal of a task as a challenge (Ling et al., 2014; Prem, Ohly, Kubicek, & Korunka, 2017; Wendt et al., 2011) and a negative association with work overload and role ambiguity (Cullen, Gerbasi, &

Chrobot-Mason, 2018; Gkorezis et al., 2016; Jiang, Jiang, & Nielsen, 2019; Ling et al., 2014; Liu & Bern-Klug, 2013). A more recent study indicates a relationship with job crafting, suggesting employees who are thriving are successful in adapting their role to provide meaning (Jipeng, Kaiyuan, Xiangfei, Xiaofang, & Ling, 2019). Taken together, these findings suggest that an individual who can identify their contribution within a broader context and consider it to be meaningful, challenging, but also achievable; may be more likely to thrive at work.

The smaller number of studies that contribute to this theme may not, in itself be an indicator of its relative importance, but may be more indicative of bias associated with the prevailing theoretical position. Indeed the nature of the work itself is not emphasised in the recent meta-analysis of thriving at work whereby engagement and perceived stress are considered to be individual characteristics, rather than conceptualising a cluster of antecedents that relate to the nature of the work (Kleine et al., 2019, in press). Furthermore another recent conceptualisation proposed by Jipeng et al. (2019) groups the antecedents into either individual or relational characteristics. However, when consideration is given to the data from the studies from the qualitative tradition previously identified a different picture emerges, as meaningful work is a dominant theme in five of the eight studies (Ling et al., 2014; Sim et al., 2016; Sumsion, 2004; Travis et al., 2014; Wendt et al., 2011). As previously identified in this review, the dominant theoretical perspective amplifies the social nature of this construct and this may mean this important aspect of the experience may not be garnering the attention it merits within the quantitative paradigm.

3.4.4 A determinant of positive organisational outcomes.

This last theme conveys the findings of 16 studies that are situated in the quantitative tradition and suggest a correlation or predictive relationship with some other work-related variable. Whilst a causal relationship cannot be substantiated, the authors hypothesise from a theoretical perspective that thriving at work is a determinant, or cause, of positive organisational outcomes including performance, reduced intent to leave, and creativity and innovation. No one outcome dominates this subset of the literature and the validity of the data is constrained by the quality issues identified within the MMAT, but the pattern within the findings across a diverse range of populations suggests that there may be benefits to organisations that are worthy of further exploration. Firstly, a relationship to job performance is supported by six studies, five of which suggested a correlation (Frazier & Tupper, 2018; Gerbasi, Parker, Cross, Porath, & Spreitzer, 2015; Paterson et al., 2014; Ren et al., 2015; Walumbwa et al., 2018) and one study of workers in Pakistan indicated thriving at work might play a mediating role in the relationship between managerial coaching and performance (Raza et al., 2017). However these results do not present a clear and consistent picture, cannot claim causality, and definitions of performance vary from task (Frazier & Tupper, 2018) to unit performance (Walumbwa et al., 2018). It is also possible that the relationship may be bi-directional, if someone is performing they are more likely to be thriving.

The second relationship, which is explored by four quantitative studies, is a correlation with intent to leave or turnover (Abid et al., 2015; Anjum, Marri, & Khan, 2016; Gkorezis et al., 2016; Ren et al., 2015) and hypothesise thriving at work decreases intent to leave and turnover. In one such study Anjum et al. (2016) found

that it was a significant predictor of turnover intention among 237 employees in Quetta, Pakistan. The study was cross sectional and the sample size and character limited generalisability, but the study of a very different sample of 273 Greek academics found a similar relationship (Gkorezis et al., 2016). Abid et al.'s (2015) study of 147 employees from a software house in Lahore, Pakistan was less conclusive. Although a relationship between the two was indicated, turnover intention was only measured by the supervisor, and the hypothesis that thriving at work would moderate the relationship between perceived organisational support and turnover intention, was not supported. It may be that an individual's response to questions relating to their intention to leave may be influenced by social desirability and contextual factors such as financial stability such that it may be difficult to isolate a consistent relationship between these two variables and it may vary significantly by individual.

Finally, the area of creativity and innovation receives most attention, with seven studies suggesting a predictive or mediating role (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017; KoÇAK & Agun, 2019; Riaz, Xu, & Hussain, 2018; Wallace et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2019). Carmeli and Spreitzer (2009) suggest that thriving at work acts as a mediator of the relationship between connectivity and innovative behaviours, a finding supported by a study considering the relationship between the quality of the exchange between leader and employee, and creativity (Xu et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2019). Jaiswal and Dhar (2017) find evidence of a moderating role between trust in a leader and creativity; when thriving at work is high, the relationship between the two is strengthened. This resonates with the identification of psychological safety and trust as an antecedent of thriving at work

previously identified in this review, and suggests a relationship between the two. Finally, two studies find that it supports a climate of employee involvement (KoçAk & Agun, 2019; Wallace et al., 2016). This is one area where the findings are most consistent and the authors share a theoretical explanation for the relationship, citing the broaden and build theory of positive emotions whereby the positive affect (vitality) causes changes in cognitive activity and a broadening of thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson, 2001). Interestingly the meta-analysis previously discussed also identified three groups of outcomes in a proposed conceptual model: health, job attitudes (including commitment and turnover) and performance (Kleine et al., 2019, in press) and the strongest correlation is to creativity.

3.4.5 Reaching conclusions from the findings.

Given the diverse characteristics of the studies identified, and the breadth of topics investigated in this integrated review, the themes are broad and lack specificity and the methodological limitations previously identified suggest it would be imprudent to conclude conceptual clarity or causal relationships. This is, in part, due to the concerns identified in the quality assessment of the extant literature, but is reinforced by the potential for bias towards positive results so often seen in published literature. All 40 studies from the quantitative tradition found some discernible relationship to the subject under scrutiny and there were no studies that reported negative or null findings (Dickerson & Mi, 1993; Murad, Chu, Lin, & Wang, 2018). Five studies reported a subset of findings that were not as predicted, but these unexpected results did not challenge the overall hypothesis (Abid et al., 2015; Hennekam, 2017; Mortier et al., 2016; Niessen et al., 2012; Prem et al., 2017). This

pattern, combined with the drawbacks identified in the MMAT, fortifies the need for caution in assuming the reliability and validity of any synthesis of the findings.

Furthermore, this body of literature is characterised by an emphasis on creating a single conceptual model that captures a generalised construct, but it could be argued that the diversity in the array of topics that have been explored in the context of thriving at work has created a lack of cohesion and an element of conceptual creep. Conceptual creep is a phenomenon which has been explored within the field of psychology, and which refers to the expansion of a concept to cover more factors, or include more symptoms, than before (Cikara, 2016). Although some scholars have contended that this might not have a negative impact on current understandings, instead reflecting merely an increasing sensitivity (Haslam, 2016); others have pointed to the issues this poses for the exploration of specific psychological issues. For example, on the topic of PTSD, McNally (2006) explores how conceptual creep has undermined chances to identify the psychobiological mechanisms which might lead to the condition, and the potential for overmedicalising normal emotional responses and referring to these as stressors. Similarly, it will be important to consider that conceptual creep may be hindering a deeper understanding of the experience of thriving at work.

However this analysis does suggest an alignment to some factors that might influence thriving at work, indicates that it may influence outcomes of interest to organisations, and signposts a research agenda that has informed the objectives and research questions identified in the introductory chapter.

3.5 Discussion of the Research Agenda

Analysis of the findings, methodologies and theoretical foundations of the literature on thriving at work, suggests that there is a lack of conceptual clarity and an opportunity to re-balance the dominant methodological perspective. The opportunity to revisit some fundamental assumptions and understand what thriving at work means to individuals is further supported by the number of areas for further research identified by synthesising the contradictions, different perspectives and limitations within the extant literature. This analysis and synthesis has informed the research objectives, which have in turn generated the research questions underpinning this study (Callahan, 2010; Torraco, 2016; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005):

Table 4. Research Objectives and Questions

Research Objectives	Research Questions
Explore how individual managers describe the experience of thriving at work.	How do participants describe the experience of thriving at work? Are the descriptions of the experience of thriving at work affected by demographic factors or the nature of the organisation?
Examine the contextual and individual factors managers identify as necessary to ensure thriving at work.	
Explore how organisational culture and demographic differences may influence thriving at work.	

3.5.1 An opportunity for greater conceptual clarity.

The first area of divergence identified in the integrated literature review concerns the divergent perspectives on the fundamental nature of thriving at work, the temporal stability of the concept and the relationship between thriving at work and outside of work. This has created a lack of clarity concerning the experience of thriving at work for the individual and limits the value of current theories and conceptualisations.

In his discussion of the conceptualisation of stress, Cohen (2000) claims that there are overlapping perspectives on the nature of stress as it has been conceptualised within the literature as a response to the external events that cause stress, the physiological and psychological consequences that individuals experience, or the process whereby events and demands are evaluated as being stressful. He goes on to suggest that this had led to a plethora of measures and conceptual definitions which has led to inconsistent explorations of the phenomenon without a strong theoretical foundation (Cohen, Kessler, & Underwood Gordon, 1997). Although the measures and conceptual definitions identified in this literature review are limited, a similar pattern can be seen, as thriving at work has also been differently conceptualised as a response to certain events, a beneficial state, and as an evaluative process leading to positive outcomes, often implicitly and sometimes within the same discussion. In the theoretical introduction to their definition Spreitzer et al. (2005) imply that the concept is a response to antecedents in the work environment, but also a state of learning and vitality. However, self-adaptation theory implies a cognitive appraisal of the current state (in other words, a process), and the authors also describe it as an engine leading to good outcomes (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Thus, in the same conceptual definition, thriving at work is described by the authors as a response, a process and an outcome. This lack of clarity can be seen in the treatment of the concept in other studies in the literature. For example Gerbasi et al. (2015, p. 1425), using Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) definition, focuses on a process orientation, describing it as "an adaptive function that helps individuals navigate because they have more personal resources to draw on", whereas a more

recent study situates it as a response to high performance work systems (Zhang et al., 2018).

This lack of conceptual clarity is further reinforced by the divergent perspectives in the literature on the temporal nature of thriving at work as either a minute-by-minute construct or one which is experienced, understood and evaluated by an individual over an extended period of time. Many studies have suggested that its stability over time is an area for further exploration, and identify this lack of understanding as a limitation of their research (Niessen et al., 2012; Paterson et al., 2014; Porath et al., 2012; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014). The ideological stance taken by Spreitzer et al. (2005), concerning self-adaptation, would suggest that thriving at work is regularly monitored by the individual to create the awareness of the need to adapt, although it is not clear how often. The only identifiable research considering its transient nature, did so through a diary study conducted using daily online surveys (Niessen et al., 2012). Findings led the authors to suggest that thriving at work does vary over time, and can be affected by events or developments, and to conclude that “when employees experience positive meaning at work in the morning and report they acquired relevant knowledge, they feel more vital at the end of the workday and have a higher sense of learning” (Niessen et al., 2012, p. 481). Hennekam (2017) also aimed to investigate how the experience varied over time in a qualitative study of participants starting a new role. The findings suggested that it not only changed as the environment changed (they began a new job), but also evolved as they became more settled in role. This suggests it may be a more stable, yet still dynamic, concept. Given the questions already raised on how thriving at work is experienced,

a focus of this study will be to understand the associated criteria, frequency and timing of the evaluation process.

Finally, the nature of the relationship between thriving at work and thriving more generally is not yet well understood, and is fundamental to a conceptual understanding of how the phenomenon is experienced. Across the different methodological approaches in the literature, there are some indicators of such a relationship, but its nature is not yet explicit (Carmeli & Russo, 2016; Ling et al., 2014; Porath et al., 2012; Russo et al., 2018; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014; Wendt et al., 2011). One such indicator is a study exploring the relationship between family supportive supervisory behaviour and thriving at work (Russo et al., 2018). In two time-lagged studies in Italy (n=156) and China (n=356) a relationship between the two variables via work-family enrichment is suggested but this appears to be true only for those individuals who report a high need for caring (Russo et al., 2018). Wendt et al.'s (2011, p. 323) qualitative inquiry into thriving in emotionally demanding fields of practice identifies the importance of creating boundaries between work and home, but also acknowledge that "life resources can be empowering in work". In Porath et al.'s (2012) quantitative study, initial findings suggest that thriving varies across work and non-work settings, provoking the assumption that these pose two distinct fields for study, which should, therefore, be assessed differently. However these indicators do not provide empirical support for any single conceptualisation of this relationship, and this study seeks to add greater insight into how managers perceive it.

This review highlights the need for greater conceptual clarity and informs the first research question: how do participants describe the experience of thriving at

work? This question captures a desire to step back from the assumptions and complexities of the extant literature and develop a more fundamental understanding of the concept based on the lived phenomena.

3.5.2 The social and individual factors that influence thriving at work.

Spreitzer et al. (2005, p. 539), suggests the socially embedded nature of thriving at work is a “foundational assumption”, whilst a study among apprentices identifies “good quality psychosocial conditions” as a critical element of this phenomenon (Conway & Foskey, 2015, p. 333). This emphasis on the social nature of the construct encourages the exploration of the role of social systems and relationships, suggesting, for example, a relationship between vitality and learning and good quality social relationships (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Gerbasi et al., 2015) and supervisory support (Paterson et al., 2014). Gkorezis et al. (2013) elaborate on this by suggesting that our ability to thrive at work is determined by our sense of belonging, citing belongingness theory which describes our deep need, and motivation, for closeness and connectedness to other people (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Conversely, many of the same authors who see thriving at work as a fundamentally social construct, focus on individual agency and appraisal. Within the definition of vitality and learning proposed by Spreitzer et al. (2005), and all the subsequent explorations, agentic behaviours such as “task focus, exploration and heedful relating” are seen as the “engine of thriving” (Paterson et al., 2014, p. 434). This reflects the foundational role self-determination theory plays in this definition, and the agentic behaviour motivated by the pursuit of conditions that create growth (Spreitzer & Porath, 2014).

This emphasis on the individual is also captured by the suggestion that the individual's cognitive appraisal of their situation plays a significant role. As previously discussed, Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) work is influenced by social cognitive theory, which reinforces the importance of individual appraisal or cognition in the context of the social world of work (Bandura, 2001). Prem et al. (2017) cite the theory of challenge and hindrance stressors, and suggest that cognitive appraisals of job stressors have an impact on work outcomes (Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013). The three-stage model of stress developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1978) is also used by authors on this topic to explain how people might be adopting optimistic appraisals of a challenge when they are thriving at work (Kira & Balkin, 2014; Ling et al., 2014). These studies, in turn, suggest that positive appraisals of how a challenge will affect behaviour; whether an individual feels they have the resources to deal with a challenge; and whether the challenge is perceived as controllable or benign, are all influences on an individual's ability to thrive at work. More recently, Patterson et al. (2014) introduced psychological capital as a determinant of thriving at work, described by the original authors as "a positive appraisal of circumstances and probability for success based on motivated effort and perseverance" (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007, p. 550).

Several authors (Gerbası et al., 2015; Gkorezis et al., 2013; Hildenbrand et al., 2018; Russo et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018) situate their research within the conservation of resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 2002). Although primarily a theory of stress, these authors suggest that the individual's maintenance and pursuit of resources such as objects, states and conditions, supports thriving at work. In particular, the concept of a positive spiral, whereby those with higher levels of a

resource are set up for gains in resources, is of interest in the context of the theme of high-quality relationships previously identified within the extant literature. Hobfoll (2001, p. 337) suggests that COR is an alternative to appraisal-based theories as it focuses more on the “resources available in the environment rather than the individual’s personal construal”.

Some studies within the extant literature emphasise the individual personality differences that seem to promote thriving at work and the influence of values, beliefs, histories, experiences and identities (Kira & Balkin, 2014; Prosser et al., 2013; Ren et al., 2015; Wendt et al., 2011). No specific pattern can be detected between the findings of these studies, as they each tend to be individual in their response to a particular research question, such as the role of extraversion or neuroticism (Hennekam, 2017), or levels of political skill (Cullen et al., 2018). Kleine et al.’s (2019) meta-analysis of thriving at work captured a number of individual characteristics that the authors propose as antecedents, including psychological capital, proactive personality and perceived stress. In the studies deploying a qualitative methodology, a long list of personal qualities identified as relevant are generated, with little consistency. These include factors such as adaptability and positivity (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014), self-care (Ling et al., 2014) or confidence and belief in competence (Ren et al., 2015; Wendt et al., 2011).

This synthesis of the literature highlights disparities between the relative significance of the individual characteristics that enable a person to thrive at work and the contextual factors involved, such as the work itself or relationships with colleagues in the workplace. This is recognised in many of the calls for future research within the extant literature (i.e. Gerbasi et al., 2015; Mortier et al., 2016;

Wallace et al., 2016) and is reflected in the second objective of this research, to examine the contextual and individual factors managers identify as necessary for thriving at work. Indeed, this aspect of the extant literature resonates with the lack of conceptual clarity previously identified and thus reinforces the value of asking how participants describe the experience of thriving at work that forms the first of the two research questions driving this study.

3.5.3 The impact of organisational culture and demographics.

The exploration of social and cultural factors have recently incorporated theoretical and empirical perspectives on how a sense of community and collective thriving could influence individual thriving at work (Boyd, 2015; Travis et al., 2014; Walumbwa et al., 2018; Xu & Wang, 2019). While this reflects the widespread assumption that these social and cultural factors are likely to be important, the understanding of the role they play is nascent. This is reflected in many of the studies in the literature that focus on a specific group of workers, such as health workers or teachers, and identify the generalisability of their findings as a limitation of their research (Conway & Foskey, 2015; Gkorezis et al., 2013; Ling et al., 2014).

Very few studies explore how it may differ for different demographic groups based on age or gender, and the findings are inconclusive. Hennekam (2017) explored the experience for a specific demographic group over the age of 50 but did not seek to compare this with the experience of other age groups. Most studies on the topic do not draw attention to any demographic differences (Jiang, 2017; Niessen et al., 2017; Wallace et al., 2016; Wendt et al., 2011), with two exceptions that highlighted differences in the relationship between thriving at work and the intention to stay moderated by tenure (Gkorezis et al., 2016), and a study that

suggests it may vary with age (Anjum et al., 2016). Kleine et al.'s (2019) meta-analysis, suggested that age, gender and tenure are unrelated to thriving. However, level of education and rank appear to have a weak correlation, and there are some small differences when vitality and learning are considered separately (Kleine et al., 2019, in press). This picture suggests that demographic differences may not be as significant as might be expected, although they remain worthy of further exploration.

The third objective of this research is to explore how organisational culture and demographic differences, including gender, age, time in the role, and organisation, influence thriving at work. The extant literature suggests that the extent to which the culture of an organisation influences the experience is still an open question, and the study of demographic differences is limited. The second research question aims to provide further insight in support of this research objective by comparing and contrasting the responses of participants from two very different organisations drawn from the public and private sector, as well as exploring differences across demographic groups.

These areas of ambiguity and divergence in the extant literature provide a more detailed focus on the research objectives and will benefit from a deep exploration of individuals' perceptions and experiences. This literature review has played an influential role in the detailed design of this study and it is, therefore, important to recognise the limitations inherent in the approach taken.

3.6 Limitations of this Literature Review

Each stage of this literature review presents potential threats to validity (Russell, 2005), and a review of integrated literature reviews in nursing suggests that no such review is without limitations (Hopia et al., 2016). The first limitation with any literature review is the bias inherent in any such endeavour. Ruona and Lynham (2004) suggest the assumptions of the author restrict a review of this nature and, while the exploration of the purpose and scope of the literature review serves to illuminate and justify assumptions that might otherwise be implicit, it is always possible that other assumptions have not been identified. These assumptions can be present at each stage of the review and are likely to be most prevalent in the identification of the literature to be included, the analysis and the synthesis (Ruona & Lynham, 2004).

One strategy to minimise the bias of the individual researcher is to ensure that the selection and evaluation of papers is a process carried out by more than one person (Hart, 2018; Hopia et al., 2016; Russell, 2005). This review was carried out by a single researcher and, as clear as the criteria were, there were many instances when a decision had to be made based, at least in part, on a judgement. A different researcher may have reached a different conclusion. It is, therefore, possible that the literature included in the review and the themes that emerged represent a biased perspective. While this has been limited by the decision to include all papers that were explicitly about thriving at work from a broad range of disciplines, and the use of objective criteria wherever possible, the reliance on individual discretion still presents a possibility for bias.

The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) provides a robust mechanism to assess the quality of the literature, in order to both exclude studies from the review and incorporate perspectives informed by the assessment process (Hong, Fàbregues, et al., 2018). It is recommended that the assessment be carried out by more than one researcher to enhance consistency and objectivity (Hong, Gonzales-Reyes, et al., 2018; Pace et al., 2012). This was not possible in this instance and may have limited the effectiveness and accuracy of the quality assessment although care was taken to capture the rationale for each assessment so that the process could be repeated and cross-checked in the future thus increasing the validity and reliability of the MMAT.

As previously identified, the exclusion of grey literature served to enhance the quality of the studies included, given the more explicit and rigorous nature of the publishing process in peer-reviewed journals. Evidence has shown that this may lead to a bias towards research that reports a positive result in terms of providing support for the original hypothesis (Cullinan, 2005). Thus, while generalisability of the findings is constrained given the specific nature of the research questions posed in each study and the nature of the samples, it is also the case that there is limited disagreement, conflict and contrast within the findings.

Finally, the synthesis and analysis of the extant literature “leaves much discretion in the hands of the synthesiser” (Lomas, 2005, p. 55), and requires the reflexivity and transparency that may be expected within the constructivist paradigm. Thus, the protocols for reflexivity that are described in the next chapter were also applied to this endeavour, but the subjectivity inherent in the interpretation of diverse data can never be completely negated.

While these limitations suggest that this review is not entirely objective, and mean that the themes identified would not always emerge in the same way if this endeavour was to be repeated, the opportunity for bias has been minimised by the clear identification of the purpose and scope preceding the decisions within the literature review process, the reporting of methods that can be replicated, and the identification of which papers have informed a particular theme or perspective (Callahan, 2010; Hart, 2018; Hopia et al., 2016; Whitemore & Knafel, 2005). Care should be exercised by both the researcher and the reader in assuming that some truth will be revealed to complete our understanding of thriving at work because the gap in the literature has been clearly and objectively identified, researched and understood. It is reasonable to conclude that this review will have identified particular areas that will be useful to develop greater understanding, but it is unlikely to be comprehensive or exhaustive.

3.7 Concluding Remarks

This review explored the literature on thriving at work, identifying common themes in both methodologies and findings, and drawing attention to the differences and ambiguities in theoretical and conceptual approaches. It is argued that despite increased interest over the last five years the literature remains “scattered and in great need of systematic and theory-based synthesis” (Kleine et al., 2019, in press, p. 4). Furthermore the extant research is not based on an understanding of how thriving at work is experienced, and the findings thus far leave several important questions unanswered. The intended position of the researcher in exploring these

questions is fundamentally non-assumptive; a position which is facilitated by the lack of cohesive conclusions that can be identified within the extant literature.

This study will contribute to the emerging literature by re-introducing the voice of the person who experiences it and the focus of this inquiry will be informed by the areas of divergence and the limitations identified in this integrated literature review. The literature thus far has been heavily influenced by a positivist paradigm, particularly in relation to the construct of vitality and learning introduced by Spreitzer et al. (2005). The qualitative and phenomenological approach adopted in this study provides the opportunity to reveal basic social processes and go beyond an operational definition of a phenomenon, to describe “what people actually do in their day-to-day lives” (Silverman, 2013, p. 11). Studying the lived experience will also provide the opportunity to observe which, if any, of the many ideas introduced in the literature on thriving at work are reflected in the descriptions of the participants.

Chapter 4 - Methodology

4.1 Selection of the Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is comprised of ontological and epistemological beliefs that inform axiological and methodological approaches (Mertens, 2014, Chapter 1). The ontology describes the assumptions made about the nature of existence, whilst the epistemology identifies what constitutes knowledge, and the connection between the two creates a set of assumptions about what constitutes reality (Allsop, 2013; Crotty, 1998, Chapter 1). This view of reality informs the axiology, or ethical approach, and the methodology which can be thought of as “the theory of how the inquiry should proceed” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 8). This, in turn, underpins the choice of methods and tools used to gather and analyse data.

Although there are many classifications of research paradigms (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2014; Saunders et al., 2012), they share much common ground, and one such commonly used framework describes four philosophically different approaches to the nature of the world: positivist, post-positivist, critical theory and constructivism (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018). Creswell (2014, Chapter 1) describes positivism as an objectivist undertaking, which suggests that the elements of our environment have meaning and they exist independent from our consciousness. Post-positivism has evolved from this position and is characterised by an increased emphasis from proof of absolute certainty evident in positivism, to a greater emphasis on understanding the complex laws of nature (Bryman, 2012, Chapter 3). Critical theory or the transformative paradigm, on the other hand, seeks to influence or change the status quo, highlighting information that the subjects should be aware

of, and offering insights on how they can transform appropriately (Mertens, 2014, Chapter 1). This research paradigm is both prescriptive and normative, focussing on what behaviour in a social setting should entail (Agger, 1991). These research paradigms are not well suited to this study, as it does not aim to find the best way individuals can thrive at work by transforming themselves or their workplace (an endeavour best suited to the critical theory paradigm), or to take a positivist or post-positivist stance to prove, with any certainty, some truth about thriving at work. For these reasons, these paradigms were excluded for use in this study.

The final paradigm, constructivism, is founded on the concept of understanding the world as others experience or construct it. In this light, the participants are perceived as creative and active entities, who are capable of developing their social realities (Rasmussen, 1998). Schwandt (1994) provides the more specific paradigm of social constructivism, describing a philosophical approach that values the inquiry into individuals' experience of making meaning within their own mind. He distinguishes this from social constructionism that has a greater interest in the collective and how meaning is generated and transmitted within groups. Since the overall aim of this study is to explore how managers experience thriving at work, constructivism, and in particular social constructivism, would be the aptest for use in the present research.

The main reason for selecting this research paradigm is the alignment to the aims and objectives of the research, but it is further supported by the findings of the integrated review of the literature, that highlighted an opportunity to bring greater insight to our understanding of thriving at work, through the study of the lived experience. A renewed interest in this lived experience is needed to inform future

research into the theoretical, and ultimately practical, applications in the world of work.

4.2 Overview of the Social Constructivist Research Paradigm

Given that the social constructivist research paradigm has been identified as the most appropriate philosophical basis for this study, it is important to define the ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods available, to ensure that the assumptions on the nature of existence, knowledge and the collection of knowledge, informs all aspects of the research design and implementation (Lincoln et al., 2018).

4.2.1 Ontology of social constructivism.

On the notion of what constitutes reality, researchers using this paradigm argue that various intangible realities can exist based on individual perceptions (Bazeley, 2013, Chapter 1). In other words, the reality is dependent on the personal constructs of the people involved in the study, according to how they perceive and understand the world around them. This reality is thus limited to the context, space, time, and people within a particular situation, and the aim of the researcher is to represent this particular reality, rather than to generalise to a truth (Silverman, 2014, Chapter 1). The ontological assumptions in social constructivism challenge the assumptions made by positivists regarding the presence of a single external and tangible reality (Weber, 2004). All assumptions of realities from different backgrounds are legitimised, including those shared by a group (Mason, 1996, cited in Silverman, 2014, Chapter 3). Subsequently, each individual notion of reality presented by the research participants will be critical in the development of knowledge in this study, and an understanding of how experiences and perceptions

may be influenced by membership of a particular group will be primarily informed by individual realities.

4.2.2 Epistemology of social constructivism.

The epistemological assumptions of social constructivists are centred on the idea that knowledge is subjective, as it is developed in the social setting and dependent on the mind of the respondents (Saunders et al., 2012, Chapter 4). The reality of the situation under investigation develops from the experience of the people involved, and knowledge is formed of the multiple realities constructed by the participants (Tai & Ajjawi, 2016). This knowledge is developed through the involvement and communication with participants as stakeholders in the research and emphasises the importance of the relationship between researcher and participant (King, 2012a), as social constructivists develop a subjective meaning and subjective interpretation of the findings made. The use of this epistemological approach sets the foundation for studying reality, based on the real-life experiences of respondents.

4.2.3 The social constructivist methodology.

Social constructivism requires the investigation of human experience, particularly when the aim of the inquiry is to capture non-numerical data such as descriptions, metaphors, meaning, interpretation and subjective experience. Qualitative research refers to an exploratory approach that enables this inquiry and investigates how people are affected by changes in their environment according to their personal experiences (Silverman, 2014, Chapter 1). Unlike quantitative research, it does not involve numerical listing and analysis of data (Saunders et al.,

2012, Chapter 13), and the strength of this approach is the capability to gather rich and detailed information from the participants based on their specific social and cultural contexts. Due to the multiple realities involved, research questions are designed to be open-ended, descriptive, and non-directional. The qualitative methodology is well suited to the aims of this study as it requires an open-minded approach to the outcomes of the research and encourages methods that will facilitate the collection and analysis of rich accounts of the experience of thriving at work.

4.2.4 Social constructivist research methods.

The methods employed in data collection in the social constructivist paradigm focus on understanding the emotions, experiences, and perceptions of each participant's reality. Social constructivists use methods that develop an inductive understanding of the phenomenon through the perceptions and experiences of people who are engaged in the on-going activities being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). While the methods used to collect data might be observation, focus groups, case studies or analysis of secondary data such as written narratives or videos, the emphasis of this study was to understand the individual experience of thriving at work, and the resultant aims were best achieved using an interview designed to encourage individual exploration of that experience. Interviews are described as ways of "eliciting stories of experience" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 171). For this reason, they perfectly complement the social constructivist paradigm.

The qualitative tradition often leads to purposeful sampling, which allows the researcher to "think critically about the parameters of the population they are interested in and choose the sample case carefully on this basis" (Silverman, 2013, p.

148) and to ensure that the investigation engages people who possess the characteristics of interest (Saunders et al., 2012, Chapter 7). This was particularly important in this study, given the inclusion of two very different organisations and the identification of the specific population of managers.

When attempting to collect a complex account of each participant's reality, there is the potential for large amounts of collected data. This requires strategies to reveal the data by selecting, focusing, and transforming it, based on the goals and research questions. Methods available to the qualitative researcher for doing this are varied and include discourse analysis, grounded theory and thematic analysis (Bazeley, 2013, Chapter 1). Unlike in quantitative research, where sample size can be definitively derived through a priori power calculation, there is no assumption of a required sample size within the qualitative approach and it is ultimately decided by the researcher, based on a number of conventions and methodological requirements. In this case, a balance between the aims of capturing the individual experience as fully as possible, and the desire to explore how this experience may be different between social constructs such as organisational culture or demographic groups was required, and the rationale for both the method of data analysis and the sample size for this study is explored further in the next sections of this chapter.

4.3 Research Design

4.3.1 Recruitment and sampling strategy.

The sampling strategy was purposive and participants were drawn from the group which the research question addresses (Silverman, 2014, Chapter 3), namely managers who live and work in the UK. The scope of the sample was limited to the

UK to enable a focus on the two different organisational cultures, rather than any differences arising from national cultures. A manager was defined as anyone employed by the organisations taking part in the research with supervisory responsibility for others. The selection criteria for the organisations invited to take part included that they must represent two different organisational contexts and employ over 300 managers who could be potential candidates for this study. This criterion reflected the stated research objective to understand the role of social context in thriving at work and to facilitate the voluntary recruitment of enough participants.

To ensure the two organisations could provide a significantly different organisational cultural context, the research design stipulated that one organisation be from the public sector and one from the private sector. It is well understood, across many different areas and disciplines of research, that organisations in the public and private sector offer very different environments in which to work (Goulet & Frank, 2002; Wright, 2001), and this provides the opportunity to study the experience of participants in truly different contexts.

a) Recruitment of the organisations.

After ethical approval from the university, two organisations were identified to take part in the proposed study, and both agreed to take part. The researcher knew, in a professional capacity, individuals in the organisations who had the authority to make this decision on behalf of their organisations. The researcher was not engaged with the organisation in any other capacity. The two organisations were chosen from a wide range of possible candidates known to the researcher because they represented two very different types of organisation in terms of structure,

culture and purpose. This provided an opportunity to compare the responses of participants from both organisations and therefore explore the stated research objective of exploring the relationship between thriving at work and the broader social factors such as organisational context. In each case, the person known to the researcher was sent an information sheet that offered pertinent information about the study. This organisation information sheet is attached in Appendix E. Both agreed to participate, as they were in the process of developing strategies to increase the wellbeing, engagement and ultimately productivity of their employees. While thriving at work was not necessarily the construct they were engaging with, it still suited their overall objectives.

Although it was not part of the original design, both organisations requested that they could choose specific departments within the broader organisation on which to focus the research and to limit the number of managers that would be invited to attend to a more manageable number. In each case, the number of managers in the department was sufficient to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and in both instances, an invitation to all managers in the organisation would have led to significantly more than 300 invitations. This was a change to the procedure presented in the original ethics application and received retrospective ethical approval.

As previously discussed it was important to ensure that the two organisations were distinctive enough from each other to explore the second research question pertaining to this study: Are the descriptions of the experience of work affected by demographic factors or the nature of the organisation? The organisations were selected to amplify the opportunity for differences between the two groups of

managers and facilitate comparisons. The selection of organisations from the public and private sector facilitated this distinction and other factors relating to the nature of the work they do, the people they employ and the values they espouse further reinforced this. A comparison of the formal, stated values of the two organisations involved in this study would compromise their anonymity as they are in the public domain. However it can be concluded that, while they share an emphasis on integrity and doing the right thing, they differ significantly in other ways that reflect their core purpose. Other differences between the two organisations can be readily identified and are summarised in the following descriptions of each.

The first organisation (Organisation A) is a UK subsidiary of a multinational organisation and operates in the field of healthcare. It is registered on the UK and US stock market, and therefore has fiduciary responsibilities to shareholders. The specific department chosen by the organisation to take part in the study, was involved in the research and development of new medicines and therapeutic approaches to significant medical conditions affecting many people around the world. The work is scientific and experimental in nature, laboratory-based and exploratory. The department recruits highly qualified specialists who are experienced in the scientific process of discovery. The work is likely to be intellectually challenging, but scientific breakthroughs are rare. The organisation therefore values expertise, competence, determination and teamwork in the context of multidisciplinary scientific work.

The second (Organisation B) is a department within the civil service. It operates within the public sector and is responsible ultimately to the public and the taxpayer. The role of this department is to recommend policy and implement plans

to deliver on the objectives of the Government of the day. The work is broad in nature, covering many aspects of public life, and the emphasis is on policy development, project planning and management of stakeholders. Most join the civil service as a long-term career choice and move around different projects and departments over time. The organisation therefore values a track record of achievement or involvement in significant projects and networking is very important. Employees of any civil service department, particularly in Whitehall, expect their work and their actions to be scrutinised and are concerned with getting things right and public perceptions. The department chosen by Organisation B was made up of multi-disciplinary civil servants.

b) Recruitment of the participants.

Once these agreements were reached, a key contact within each organisation was provided to the researcher to help coordinate the recruitment of participants. This key contact sent an email to all managers in the department identified, which in the case of Organisation A was approximately 40 people, and approximately 70 in Organisation B. The email was sent on behalf of the human resources director, the departmental leader and the researcher and is included in Appendix E. It was made very clear that participation in the research was voluntary and that participants were under no pressure to take part. To ensure confidentiality, interested parties were asked to contact the researcher directly via email. The researcher responded to each person who expressed an interest by email, to suggest a time for the interview and to provide a participant information sheet (included in Appendix E). Hart and Bond (1995) suggest that it is important for participants to be offered adequate time to read the information and respond to any questions, before offering consent for

engaging in the study, and participants were asked to take as much time as they required before responding by email to the researcher with their decision about whether to take part or not. All potential participants who were sent the participant information sheet did agree to take part. Such a high level of participation could cause individuals to feel an obligation to take part, but great care was taken to ensure that as part of the process of receiving informed consent, individuals were given the opportunity to withdraw. High levels of participation are a feature of many of the previous studies of thriving at work; a characteristic of the literature that was highlighted in the quality appraisal, and in this instance all participants conveyed enthusiasm and interest in the subject matter.

This purposeful sampling approach offered an opportunity for volunteers who met the entry criteria to engage in the study, whilst the voluntary approach for engaging in research offered an opportunity for a large number of people to participate, facilitating the gathering of a large amount of data to add to the validity and credibility of the research (Kahn, 2000; Suri, 2011).

c) Sample size.

Saunders et al. (2012, Chapter 7) suggest sample size depends on the study being conducted, and the samples used in qualitative studies are often smaller compared to those used in quantitative research, since the latter requires larger samples to demonstrate statistical incidence. In this context, there is an aspect of diminishing returns in the qualitative sample, because collecting more data does not necessarily contribute to more knowledge (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Additionally, frequencies are not critical or indicative of the quality of the research in qualitative studies, because trends in data provide the opportunity for the researcher to

develop meaning about the phenomenon, rather than make generalised hypothetical statements (McKenna & Mutrie, 2003).

In a qualitative research process, analysing data from a large sample can be complex and time-consuming (Saunders et al., 2012, Chapter 13) and the desire for a larger sample to allow for comparison and contrast, must be balanced with the ethical and epistemological requirement for depth of analysis of each participant's contribution. The concept of saturation can provide a useful guide, whereby the number of participants is sufficient to provide useful insight, and a higher number would not shed any further light on the study (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). The concept of saturation within the constructivist paradigm is problematic, as it could imply some truth has been identified and that any further exploration of the experience of an individual is somehow redundant (Tai & Ajjawi, 2016). A judgment is still required to decide the optimum number of participants, given the aims of the study and the desire to publish the conclusions of the study in suitable journals. The intention to compare the lived experience of different groups within the sample and pragmatic consideration of the amount of data to be collected and analysed, led the researcher to decide, before recruitment and as outlined in the ethics application, that 11 to 15 participants from each of the organisations would be ideal. The data gathered from such a population was deemed significant in meeting the objectives of the exploration and the research questions. Within each organisation, exactly 15 participants volunteered, and no volunteers were refused entry to the study.

4.3.2 The demographics of the participants.

Thirty participants in total were interviewed and the demographic characteristics of the participants are captured in Table 5.

Table 5. The Demographics of the Sample

	Total	% of Total	From A	% of A	From B	% of B
Participants	30		15		15	
Gender						
Male	14	47%	6	40%	8	53%
Female	16	53%	9	60%	7	47%
Size of team						
1 – 5	12	40%	3	20%	9	60%
6 - 15	10	33%	6	40%	4	27%
16 – 25	6	20%	4	27%	2	13%
26 – 200	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
201+	2	7%	2	13%	0	0%
Time in organisation (years)						
Less than 2	6	20%	4	27%	2	13%
2 – 5	5	17%	2	13%	3	20%
6 - 10	7	23%	3	20%	4	27%
11 - 40	12	40%	6	40%	6	40%
Time in role (years)						
Less than 2	19	63%	9	60%	10	67%
2 - 5	9	30%	5	33%	4	27%
6 - 20	2	7%	1	7%	1	7%
21 - 40	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Age (years)						
20 - 29	2	7%	0	0%	2	13%
30 - 39	11	37%	3	20%	7	47%
40 - 49	12	40%	9	60%	3	20%
50 - 59	5	17%	3	20%	2	13%

Note. Percentages rounded to the nearest integer.

Where necessary, categories have been combined, in order to protect the anonymity of the participants. The sample was, by chance, balanced on gender and time in the organisation, and more participants from the private sector organisation (A) were aged 40 to 49, whereas the group from the civil service organisation (B) were, on average, younger. Most of the participants reported being in their respective roles for less than five years and tenure in the organisation was evenly distributed. The group represented a variety of managerial roles, and the number of employees in their teams also varied, although 28 of the 30 participants described the size of their team as somewhere between one and 25.

4.3.3 Interview process.

The individual and phenomenological nature of the objectives of this study supports the use of an interview to “understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold meaning” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 3). The interview was designed to be semi-structured, to enable the researchers to capture consistent demographic information, explore key questions that had emerged from the integrated literature review and address the phenomenon profoundly (DiCocco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The semi-structured interview offered an opportunity for each participant to offer their own accounts of their experience and to engage in shaping the course of the interview (King, 2012a). This also provided an opportunity for the investigator to cultivate a connection with the participants, which was critical in encouraging participants to explore thriving at work more deeply (Lewis, 2003). As suggested by King (2012a), the interview had some consistent questions that were asked of each participant, giving an opportunity to gather insights from the respondents on specific issues. King (2012a) also suggests that the interviewer should make use of probes that are tailored to the participant, and allow an issue to be explored in more depth. The combination of the two offers an opportunity to gain rich information based on the personal experiences of each person, as well as to probe for more information in situations where the answer does not seem to capture their full experience. The key strength of this approach is the interactivity, which facilitates engagement of the respondents and offers a chance to gain further insights about the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions on the subject of thriving at work (Turner, 2010). There are limitations to this method of data collection that required careful consideration

within the research design. Most notably the semi-structured interview may illicit a “partial picture” based on the interviewee’s perceptions of the interviewer, a desire to withhold information that they do not wish to discuss or a wish to “cast himself or herself in a socially desirable role” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 381) . Given the epistemological stance within social constructivism the purpose of the interview is not to remove bias completely and extract the truth, but to acknowledge the role of both interviewer and interview as “active agents in the co-construction in the content of the interview” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 170). There was, however, an effort to ensure that participants felt able to communicate with the interviewer as openly as possible by ensuring that the researcher was clearly differentiated from the organisation and positioned as a credible and competent research professional, giving the interviewee control over where and when the interview took place, expressing gratitude for their involvement at each stage of the process and developing and maintaining rapport throughout the interview process (Saunders et al., 2012).

The critical incident technique (CIT) was used in every interview, to investigate one experience of thriving at work volunteered by the participant, in-depth. CIT is an investigative tool that provides the opportunity to explore previous experiences, relevant to the research question, more deeply, and identify the patterns that emerge within data (Chell, 2003). Participants in this study were asked to consider a time when they were thriving at work, which could be in the past or the present. The interviewer was careful not to provide guidance on the duration of the experience, to ensure that participants were able to volunteer an incident that was temporary in nature, a recent meeting for instance, or an episode over a longer

period of time. CIT relies on the selection of an incident where “the consequences were so clear that the participant had a definite idea regarding the effects” (Saunders et al. 2012, p. 391), and the interviewer, therefore, encouraged participants to take their time to select an example that was particularly poignant to them, as they had not been asked to prepare this in advance. Participants were then asked to talk about this time in some detail, describing why they had chosen this particular time, the role they had at the time, and the context they were working in. The researcher encouraged a broad and deep exploration of this particular instance, with the use of probing questions and requests for further detail when the descriptions became too vague. This allowed the researcher to avoid generalisations, assumptions and hypothetical examples of thriving at work (Kemppainen, 2000), and provided the opportunity for the analysis to “relate context, strategy and outcomes” and look for repetition of patterns (Chell, 2012, p. 47).

An interview guide was designed to ensure a consistent approach. In this context priority was given to questions related to the areas for further research identified in the literature review and the research questions providing the focus of the inquiry:

- How do participants describe the experience of thriving at work?
- Are the descriptions of the experience of thriving at work affected by demographic factors or the nature of the organisation?

The questions were designed to avoid a conceptual conversation and to encourage a focus on the real and lived experience of thriving at work. CIT was an important aspect of this but was further supported by questions that related to specific aspects of thriving at work that have the potential to elucidate how it was experienced by

the individual. The relationship between thriving at work and other areas of life, for instance, was identified in the literature review as an opportunity for further research that would deepen our understanding of the concept. The avoidance of hypothetical or conceptual discussions and the need to manage time and create focus meant some areas worthy of questioning were not included. For example, the participants' understanding of the differences between constructs such as thriving, flourishing and engagement was not explored. This created some limitations and areas for further research identified in the final chapter.

A copy of this guide can be found in Appendix F and covers the following:

- Demographics (structured, consistent questions).
- The importance of thriving at work to the participant.
- Detailed exploration of a time when they were thriving at work (deploying CIT).
- The relationship between thriving at work and thriving in other areas of their life.
- Describing someone they perceive to be thriving at work.
- Any additional themes that emerge during the interview or that the participant would like to add.

The interview guide developed for this research made use of both consistent questions and provided opportunities to explore specific responses to these questions. It also allowed the interviewer to ask questions about new themes or areas of interest that emerged either during the interview or as the interviews progressed.

Thriving at work was not defined by the interviewer, to allow the participant to express their own understanding of the concept. The participant information sheet sent out in advance of the interview did reference that the research aimed to

explore their experience of thriving at work, described as “those times you felt most energised and engaged in your work”. This phrase was not referenced within the interview by either the interviewer or the interviewees.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, an approach which ensures that the interviewer can observe non-verbal communication to aid their understanding (Britten, 1995). At the end of each interview, the researcher made notes on their impressions of the interview, to capture both the non-verbal aspects of the interview and any reflections on the discussion. The interviews were conducted at the respondents’ convenience, at the workplace or a venue of their choice. It was anticipated that each interview would take 50 minutes (excluding the time taken to discuss and agree to consent), and an hour and a half was allowed for each interview to ensure that participants would not feel rushed. All interviews were completed within 35 to 54 minutes, with a mean length of 44 minutes. This fits within the parameters of 30 minute to several hours, which has been defined as the time needed to create rapport, engage in the interview, and probe for more information, without the respondents getting bored or experiencing fatigue (DiCocco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). They were recorded using two digital audio-recorders in case one should fail.

4.3.4 Approach to analysis.

The researcher transcribed the interview recordings using f5 transcription software. Verbatim transcription was used to capture the words spoken by both the researcher and the interviewer, as well as pauses, hesitations and specific emotive utterances such as laughter, sighs or groans. Phrases or specific words that might identify the individual were then deleted and replaced with a marker to record the

deletion. The notes taken by the interviewer at the end of each interview were treated in the same way and linked to the unique code for each participant. Analysis of the data was facilitated by the use of thematic templates, a method for organising and analysing the data that is able to reflect both the organising principles implied by the research objectives and the themes emerging from the data (King, 2012b). This approach to data analysis has been widely used in the management sciences (Brooks, Serena, Turley, & King, 2015; Collins, Cartwright, & Hislop, 2013) and facilitates comparison of different data sets and the identification of different trends within subsets of the data (King, 2012b). This focus on comparison is particularly important given one of the research objectives of this study to explore the impact of the broader social context on the factors that influence thriving at work. Template analysis enables the comparison of data across the two organisations, and in the context of the demographic information available about each participant.

Template analysis can be applied from a number of epistemological positions (Brooks et al., 2015) and the use of a priori codes within the social constructivist paradigm should be kept to a minimum in order to allow the themes to be constructed from the data (Brooks et al., 2015). The first template was therefore developed by generating a small number of a priori codes to provide some initial organisation of the data, based on the areas covered within the interview (King, 2012b; Saunders et al., 2012, Chapter 13). These first organising themes were:

- Factors that contributed to thriving at work.
- Relationships between thriving at work and thriving at home.
- The evaluation of thriving at work.
- Indicators of thriving at work.
- Why thriving at work is important.

N-Vivo was used to facilitate the coding of the data, and initially, large sections of the transcripts were coded to these organising codes, which provided the first iteration of an overarching organisation of the template. As each transcript was then reviewed again, sections, sentences or phrases were attributed to codes, intended to capture both the content and the meaning of the participants' reflections on their experience of thriving at work (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, Chapter 6), and the use of template analysis allowed for parallel and hierarchical coding (King, 2012b). These codes were embedded in the hierarchy of the organising codes or generated at the top level of the template. To generate codes that conveyed more than just the content of speech required constant reflexivity and analysis (Pillow, 2003). This was particularly important given that the use of coding software such as NVivo can encourage a focus on simplistic content analysis, whereby each phrase is considered in isolation and the presence of certain words determines the attribution of a particular phrase to a code (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, Chapter 6). This could lead to a "textual investigation" within the quantitative tradition, whereby the researcher establishes precise codes to capture specific phrases and then counts the number of instances this occurs (Silverman, 2014, p. 116). As a result, care was taken to ensure that each coded section was considered within the context of that participant's contribution, in order to capture the "meaning behind the words" (Silverman, 2014, p. 213).

In this context consideration was given to the non-verbal cues captured during the interview. In particular this data was examined to provide further information that either reinforced or negated the words being spoken. Inconsistencies between the words spoken and the visual cues were not found across the interviews but there were times when the non-verbal cues reinforced or

emphasised the participants' verbal responses. These instances were incorporated into the analysis and are referenced, where applicable, in the next chapter.

As coding progressed, the structure of the template was regularly reviewed to accommodate emerging themes and to ensure that the themes were organised in a way that reflected the data. As a result, the template evolved as codes were both added and deleted, and hierarchies within the codes began to emerge. This is one of the benefits of template analysis, as it provides a flexible, but rigorous approach to organising the data (King, 2012b). Over time, the template moved away from organising themes that reflected the interview structure, towards broader themes that transcended this structure, seeking to deliver "a rich yet complex account of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). By way of illustration, one interim version of the template had retained the organising theme of the factors that contribute to thriving at work, whilst evolving to capture sub-themes around the role of the participant's line manager, relationships with other people at work, the nature of the work itself, and further sub-themes reflecting more specific content and meaning. This section of one interim template is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. One Organising Theme in an Interim Template

Organising theme	Sub-theme (level 1)	Sub-theme (level 2)	Sub-theme (level 3)
Factors that contribute to thriving at work	Role of the line manager	Line manager thriving	
		Line manager empowers	Gives freedom
			Shows trust in me
		Getting on with line manager	
		Recognised by line manager	
		Support of the line manager	Cover for mistakes
			Advice and guidance
	Personal support		
	Relationships with other people at work	Leading a team that is thriving	
		Recognised by co-workers	
		Co-workers' support	Got my back
			Advice and help
		Being part of a cohesive team	Clear Goal
			Getting on well with co-workers
	Treated as expert		
	Characteristics of the Work	Challenge or difficulty	
		Clear plan or goals	
		Control	
		Reaching the end goal	
		Meaningful and worthwhile work	Vision or long-term goal
			Work contributes to the greater good
			Making a difference
		Learning	New experiences
New information			
Progress		Small steps	
	Leads to further progress		

This interim example also illustrates how an early theme of learning developed into two new sub-themes that captured different perspectives on what participants meant by learning: new experiences and new information. This iterative

process of creating sub-themes or new themes and recoding the existing data continued throughout the analysis.

In the later stages of the analysis, consideration was given to themes that may transcend the structure of the template (King, 2012b). Themes that were connected in meaning were identified, as were themes that, when considered together, suggested some new meaning which had the potential to make a contribution to understandings of thriving at work. This process created a gradual shift from organising codes that acted as “labels to attach to a section of text ... which may be important to interpretation” (King, 2012b, p. 257), to thematic codes that acted as “integrating relational statements” (Saldãna, 2009, p. 13). To encourage reflexivity and an emphasis on emergent themes over organisation and neatness, each of the changes to the template was recorded, the rationale noted, and this record of changes to the template was regularly reviewed throughout coding. An excerpt from this record is provided in Appendix J. The researcher also noted potentially integrating themes and annotated examples which, along with the template itself, provided useful insight. Mindmaps were used to allow for a more connective, less linear, approach to the data (Crabtree & Miller, 1999), and the N-Vivo software-enabled new codes to be created by combining new and relevant extant codes, ensuring the researcher could sense-check each new theme by referencing the participants’ original contributions. The final template, therefore, captured these integrative themes that considered how the themes identified so far intersected with, and related to, each other (Attride-Stirling, 2001), seeking to provide “a comprehensive, contextual and integrated understanding of what has been found” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 191).

Throughout the analysis, the software recorded both the number of participants whose personal experience resonated with a particular theme and the number of times it was mentioned. This is not in the positivist tradition of defining the size of the theme to compare, predict and measure; rather, it gives a sense of how loud this voice was within the interviews, to better understand the participants' shared experience of thriving at work and to know what was unique to each of them (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, Chapter 6). The distribution of codes within and across transcripts also enables exploration of potential variations in the participants' perceptions across the two organisations, as well as across the known demographics, and can help "draw attention to aspects of the data which warrant further attention" (King, 2012b, p. 266). In reporting this analysis, however, the number of participants that have alluded to a theme is not given, as this could encourage a positivistic and quantitative lens (White, Woodfield, & Ritchie, 2003).

4.3.5 Reflexivity.

The discussion of the issues encountered in both the collection and analysis of the data clearly identifies the need for the researcher to engage in reflexive practices throughout the process and to identify the decisions they make along the way in order to identify and limit their influence on the outcome of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The desire to recognise the potential for bias through reflective practices was incorporated throughout the research process, including the review of the literature that incorporated clear criteria for both the search of the literature and inclusion in the analysis. The interviewer captured their own responses to the questions in the interview guide before commencing the interviews, to increase awareness of their own opinions and perspectives. The reflections of the researcher

were captured throughout in a journal format, enabling the record and examination of thoughts, ideas, reactions and opinions in real-time and retrospectively. This reflective journal sought to capture reflections at the personal, professional and disciplinary level, incorporating the researcher's motivations and preferences, perceptions of participants, the interpersonal dynamics of each interview, and their own theoretical, epistemological and political stances (Wilkinson, 1998). A summary of this reflective journey is provided in Appendix I.

In the interviews, this reflection was useful in the identification of nascent themes and aimed to ensure that they were appropriately incorporated but did not overly influence subsequent interviews. The researcher also captured their experience of the interviews, what they noticed about specific participants or themes they perceived in the conversations. In the later phases of the research, the journal was used to track decisions made regarding coding and analysis, to minimise the influence of personal views and to ensure that these decisions reflected the rich experience captured in the data.

4.3.6 Ethical considerations.

The axiology, or ethics and values, of any research design, is inherently linked to the paradigm that underpins it (Creswell, 2009, Chapter 3), and the constructivist paradigm requires an axiological perspective that values and promotes authenticity, trustworthiness, balanced viewpoints, reflexivity, and rapport (Mertens, 2014, Chapter 1). In this study, the ethical considerations were centred on five key aspects identified by De Vaus (2014, Chapter 5) and every effort was made to follow best practice as outlined in the guidelines provided by the researcher's host institution, Lancaster University (2012). The five aspects identified by De Vaus (2014) are

voluntary participation, informed consent, no harm, confidentiality, and anonymity and privacy.

Ethical approval was granted by Lancaster University before the organisations were approached to take part, and the full ethics proposal is included in Appendix E, along with the information sheets, consent forms and other correspondence between the researcher, the organisations and participants. The retrospective approval for the change to the recruitment process mentioned above is also included.

Upon completion of a study, it is ethical for researchers to appreciate the contributions made by various stakeholders (Saunders et al., 2012, Chapter 6). In this case, both organisations and each participant were sent a report that informed them of the key findings of the study as a token of appreciation for their participation. Care was taken to protect the anonymity of the participants by limiting the specificity of the demographic information provided and the judicious use of quotes, ensuring they did not convey information that could identify an individual.

4.3.7 Reporting.

As mentioned above, a summary of this research has been presented to the two organisations and the participants involved in the study. It is anticipated that a summary of this study will be suitable for publication, and the integrated literature review will be submitted for publication in suitable journals.

4.4 The Research Objectives Revisited

A research design based on any research paradigm must ensure the philosophical coherence of the study, and the ontological and epistemological

assumptions should be embedded in the research objectives, which are replicated below:

1. Explore how individual managers define and describe how they experience thriving at work.
2. Examine the contextual and individual factors managers identify as important to thriving at work.
3. Explore how organisational culture and demographic differences may influence thriving at work.

Inherent in these objectives is the ontological assumption that each person has their own reality, and a person or group develops meaning according to their interactions in the social environment. Similarly, the nature of knowledge is assumed to be subjective, since it is developed in the social setting and relies on the mind of an individual. The assumptions of the social constructivist paradigm are at the core of this research and the methods deployed and described in this chapter reflect the qualitative methodological assumptions that have also informed the decisions on the design and execution of this study.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

In the context of the aims and objectives of this study social constructivism was identified as the philosophical underpinning for the ontological, epistemological and methodological choices made in the design. This led to the decision to use a qualitative approach to the current research, focused on the phenomenon of thriving at work. Purposive sampling was used to identify respondents who had supervisory responsibility in two very different organisations and a semi-structured interview was deployed. The interview contained an element of critical incident technique to probe more deeply a specific time when participants were thriving at work. The data

collected were analysed using template analysis to capture key themes that came from a priori codes informed by the literature review and evolved as coding progressed. Furthermore, the axiology of the constructivist approach led to careful consideration of the ethical implications of the research, which were integrated into the detailed research design. The research produced over 22 hours of interviews from 30 participants and an analysis of this data is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 – Analysis of the Participants’ Experience of Thriving at Work

In this chapter the integrative themes pertaining to the experience of thriving at work are presented, followed by an analysis of the data comparing responses from participants from the two different organisations and across demographic groups. This analysis seeks to inform the responses to the research questions identified in the introduction to this thesis, namely:

- How do participants describe the experience of thriving at work?
- Are the descriptions of the experience of thriving at work affected by demographic factors or the nature of the organisation?

In keeping with the social constructivist paradigm, themes are presented to represent the experience of the participants, rather than to fit a pre-conceived framework based on existing theory (Yardley, 2017). The initial a priori codes were created with the focus of inquiry in mind, but the template evolved through the process of both coding and analysis and required a focus on the themes and associations that were woven into their responses. As a result, three integrative themes were identified: mutual trust as the foundation of thriving at work, making a difference generates thriving at work and the potential for the experience to be an upward spiral. The final template that supports these integrative themes is shown in Table 7 and quotes supporting the theme and sub-themes of mutual trust are provided as an example in Appendix G.

Throughout the analysis the term *co-worker* refers to individuals who worked alongside the participant as peers, the *line manager* is the person who they reported directly to, and *colleagues* denotes an amalgamation of co-workers and the people who reported to them. The word *team* was used by participants to describe both the

team they were a part of with their co-workers and the group of people who worked for them. This distinction is made clear, if relevant, in the analysis although participants did not often distinguish between the two.

Table 7. The Final Template of Integrative Themes

Integrating theme	Sub-theme (level 2)	Sub-theme (level 3)	Sub-theme (level 4)	
Mutual trust as the foundation of thriving at work	Good relationships	Getting on with line manager		
		Being part of a cohesive team		
	Feeling trusted	Recognised by colleagues		
		Recognised by line manager		
		Line manager empowers		Shows trust in me
	Trusting in colleagues	Competent colleagues		
		Co-workers' support		
		Line manager's support		
	Making a difference generates thriving at work	Challenge	Difficulty	New experience New information
Learning				
Meaning		Vision or long-term goal		
		Work contributes to the greater good		
Ownership		Line manager empowers*	Gives freedom Does not micro-manage	
		Work linked to identity		
Progress				
Validation		Achievement	Doing well, success	
			Recognised by colleagues*	
			Recognised by line manager*	
			Leading a thriving team	

Thriving at work as an upwards spiral	Progress*			
	Doing well, success*			
	Leading a thriving team*	Contributed to others' thriving*		
	How thriving is evaluated	Looking back		
		Looking forward		
		Daily		
		Less often but regular		
	Emotional evaluation	Energy, excitement and enthusiasm	See in others	
			See in self	
		Happiness	Desire to be happy	
			Well-being or contentment	
			Confidence	See in others
			See in self	
Compartmentalise home and work	Home impacts on work			

* replication of code

5.1 Mutual Trust as the Foundation of Thriving at Work

Participants consistently perceived the quality of their relationships at work as an important aspect of their ability to thrive and described a sense of trusting and being trusted. Participants perceived recognition of competence and contribution as signals of trust, as well as the freedom they were given by their line manager.

Participants also described the importance of trusting co-workers and their line manager to provide support and backup when needed. One participant captured the importance of this integrative theme:

"If I trust the people around me that tends to make me thrive at work"

Participant 4, Organisation A

This quote suggests that the presence of trust may be essential for the experience of thriving at work, and responses from participants implied that mutual trust enabled them to feel safe, build self-confidence and develop stronger connections.

Good relationships with their line manager, co-workers and the team that worked for them were perceived to provide a foundation for trust, and participants described the importance of getting on well with the people with whom they worked, as captured by this participant:

“ I have to get on with the people in my team I think, I think that’s the only thing.”

Participant 10, Organisation A

The relationship with the manager was often woven into the story told by participants, and they were more likely to perceive mutual trust if they respected and liked them:

“If you’ve got somebody who’s amazing that’s great and if you have somebody who’s awful then that’s not good.”

Participant 8, Organisation B

Good relationships with colleagues were also recognised as an important aspect of mutual trust, and participants described the importance of being part of a cohesive team where people liked each other and were passionate about common goals:

“Everyone’s working to the same objective and believes and is passionate.”

Participant 6, Organisation A

Participants emphasised clarity of roles in the context of their team of co-workers, as captured by a participant from Organisation A:

“What we now have is a team of people, we’ve got a very clear vision about where we’re going, how we’re going to deliver that, and I still feel good about that now.”

Participant 1, Organisation A

They also described the importance of cohesion within the team that worked for them and many participants perceived a connection to their own ability to thrive at work, as summarised by this participant:

“All the periods I can look back on and I can say ‘that was a really good period’, it’s never been just me, it’s always been the team.”

Participant 13, Organisation B

This may relate to a later finding in this analysis concerning the perceived validation of their own team thriving, and their understanding of the role of their own line manager in creating opportunities for them to thrive.

It is perhaps not surprising that a good relationship with their line manager and managing or being part of cohesive teams who also got on well and were passionate about common goals helped create a working environment where participants felt they could thrive. However, beyond this general perception, many participants from both organisations identified specific behaviours that built trust and, inherent in this theme, was an understanding that the most beneficial experience of trust was two-way. When participants were thriving at work, they felt able to trust their line manager and other colleagues, but also perceived that they

themselves were trusted. Furthermore, the way that trust was experienced was slightly different if it involved the manager.

The majority of participants identified that a line manager who gave them autonomy and freedom was key. This may not initially appear to be related to the theme of mutual trust but, for many, it created a perception that their line manager trusted them, as described by this participant:

“That’s someone saying, ‘I trust you as an individual to deliver this thing that we really need’, that plays to your sense of worth, value and ability.”

Participant 2, Organisation B

As this quote suggests, the perceived trust of the line manager built their confidence and sense of self-worth. A small number of participants described being given freedom and perceiving that as a signal of trust, even though they did not enjoy a positive relationship with the line manager. Being trusted by that person still enabled them to thrive at work. One participant described such a time:

“I had a really bad relationship with my boss at the time that at the end of that he sort of let me do things on my own, so even though that bit of it had been really, really bad, him leaving me to do that on my own was a good thing.”

Participant 14, Organisation B

This freedom created the opportunity for participants to take ownership of a particular challenge or work area, an idea that will be revisited in the discussion of the next theme.

If freedom was a signal of trust from the line manager, support built trust the other way. The nature of this support fell into two categories. The first was the

importance of knowing their line manager would support them if they made a mistake. This is summarised by one participant:

“You always had one another’s backs, so you never dropped anyone in it, if there was a mistake, just immediately the more senior person would take the hit.”

Participant 13, Organisation B

Secondly, managerial guidance and advice were identified as a specific form of support that contributed to mutual trust. The guidance and advice from the line manager was also often described as helping the participant navigate the organisation, ensuring resources were available and managing the organisation above them so that they could focus on their job and get things done:

“He was the enabler and made it so much easier ... he was like wing cover.”

Participant 15, Organisation A

Of the participants who described the importance of advice and guidance from their line manager, very few used the term *coaching*, and the majority of participants did not bring up coaching, even though the use of this term is widespread within organisations, focusing instead on the advice and air cover their manager provided.

Most participants chose to describe the sense of knowing that the support was there, rather than the specific instances when support was given. This may relate to the value participants also placed on freedom as their line manager's support was critical to their ability to thrive at work, but only when needed:

“It gave me that space and that removal of immediacy of support to make it a challenge but in the back of my mind was the knowledge that I do have a good support infrastructure behind me.”

Participant 13, Organisation A

This suggests a balance between freedom and support is ideal:

“They are there to talk to, to give feedback, to consult with, but they give you the freedom to just get on with the job.”

Participant 6, Organisation B

Overall, participants saw the role of the line manager as critical to their thriving and this is clearly identifiable in this theme of mutual trust. As one participant described it:

“I think managers are really, really important because I think that can really make or break ... probably above and beyond a lot of other things that we’ve talked about.”

Participant 11, Organisation B

Participants also saw being able to trust their other colleagues as essential.

One participant simply said:

“If I trust the people around me that tends to make me thrive at work.”

Participant 4, Organisation A

Expertise and competence seemed to play a role in both the trust participants had in others, and the perception that they were trusted in return. Participants often described scenarios when they were thriving at work, in which everyone was good at what they did and could be relied upon to deliver their part. This seemed to create energy and ease that made the work more fun and at the same time more

challenging. One participant described such a time when they were working on a complex project with a multi-disciplinary group of experts. They described how the nature of the project meant this could have been a very tense and difficult scenario, but the way the team worked together made all the difference. In particular they described how easily the team divided up work, took accountability for their part and didn't step into other areas. Participants also valued being recognised as an expert among their colleagues and often described how the trust shown to them by others contributed to their confidence. This was illustrated by a participant from Organisation B:

"I must get a sense of value as being like a trusted, knowledgeable person."

Participant 3, Organisation B

Participants also emphasised the importance of trust as an antidote to fear and anxiety, as participants expressed the safety and confidence they associated with trust. One participant eloquently captures this:

"Fear is not good for thriving, that's my conclusion."

Participant 4, Organisation B

This theme captures the key behaviours from colleagues and line managers that enabled participants to feel trusted and to trust, which subsequently led to thriving at work.

5.2 Making a Difference Generates Thriving at Work

All participants perceived that thriving at work required a positive appraisal of the difference they were making. Many participants identified the importance of making a contribution that was attributable only to them and which added value to a

situation or challenge. For some, this connected to their sense of why it was important to them, providing a sense of identity and suggesting that if they were to spend so much time at work, it needed to count in some way. The appraisal of this contribution was individual but still seemed to incorporate a blend of ownership, challenge, meaning and progress, supported by both internal and external validation.

Ownership was an important element of the experience, enabling the difference they were making to be readily identifiable. This participant described how important it was to them:

“I was thriving in that environment because ... this was basically my project which is the first time I’ve had ownership”

Participant 6, Organisation A

There was also the sense that thriving at work incorporated an ability to articulate the difference they were able to make that was unique to them; it somehow might not have happened had they not been there, as illustrated by this participant:

“People like to feel they’re bringing something kind of special that perhaps others don’t have.”

Participant 6, Organisation B

One participant described a project they were involved in that enabled them to thrive because they could identify their contribution in this way. The project involved sorting out a long-standing problem area of the organisation and so making a difference was not going to be easy. Indeed during their time leading this work they did not feel they had solved the problem. However they described their unique contribution to moving it forward and the satisfaction of feeling that progress,

however small, would not have happened had they not been there. Another participant summed up their experience:

“It was my personal touch that actually helped something as well – it’s really important.”

Participant 7, Organisation B

The sense of ownership mentioned by so many participants was often perceived to come, in part, from a line manager who created freedom for them to take accountability and work independently. As previously discussed, this was seen as a signal of trust but, just as importantly, participants described the excitement and challenge of the opportunity to make a difference at the individual level. This feature of the line manager's role was noteworthy for the consistency in the language used, particularly terms such as *stepping back* and *space*. As one participant put it:

“He was very good at stepping back and letting us get on with it.”

Participant 9, Organisation A

Several participants described the negative impact of micro-management on their ability to thrive, attributing this to their line manager being too involved in the finer details and not providing the conditions for them to take ownership. This was highlighted by one participant:

“It undermines your competence and confidence as well, you think I have to check to get every step.”

Participant 8, Organisation A

Participants often identified challenges in their work as one way they knew they were making a difference, but it was necessary to look beyond the words used to understand what participants were describing. In some instances, the word

challenge related to pressure or difficulty associated with the task at hand, but participants were also likely to describe areas of work that involved learning and novelty as a challenge.

Many participants mentioned the challenge associated with pressure or difficulty and were often very clear about how important challenge was to their ability to thrive at work; as expressed by one participant:

“It would be a very boring, sad place to come into an environment every day where I didn’t feel challenged.”

Participant 6, Organisation A

Some participants voluntarily divulged their perceptions of how they knew they were not thriving at work, and described a sense of having too much to do and feeling overwhelmed, particularly if it may ‘threaten’ a sense of competence or ability to deliver what is needed. One participant describes this need to balance competence and challenge as:

“the problem has to be complex enough that it’s worth the competence of the team ... it’s both challenging enough task and the prize is big enough and the team don’t feel overwhelmed by it, they actually feel they can do it”

Participant 13, Organisation B

If a task or problem became too difficult, this was likely to be perceived as unhelpful and one participant expressed this note of caution in relation to failure:

“I don’t like it when I know I’m going to fail because there is too much to achieve in a certain amount of time.”

Participant 4, Organisation A

This perspective was further reinforced by participants who described times when the challenge or pressure of being busy was too great and this inhibited their ability to thrive:

“To me fire-fighting is not the sort of job I want to do and that makes me feel as if I’m not thriving if all I’m doing is desperately trying to keep something like the email numbers down, that to me is well, there’s more to life than that.”

Participant 3, Organisation B

In contrast, participants described feeling in control when they were thriving at work and this appeared to relate to the participants’ perception of their ability to cope with the challenges they were facing. In describing what it felt like to thrive at work, one participant responded with the following illustration:

“Everything is kind of flowing, I feel like the plates are spinning and that’s fine.”

Participant 2, Organisation B

Participants from both organisations implied an element of self-reference in the definition of a challenge that helped them thrive at work, somehow articulating the challenge as beyond their comfort zone. One participant describing a particular task, summarised this:

“This is quite a tall order and some of this is out with my usual sphere, but that’s exactly when I feel like I’m thriving.”

Participant 13, Organisation A

This connects to the second type of challenge mentioned by participants, that of novelty and learning. For many participants, the source of learning was new

experiences, working in new areas on new challenges or with new people. The subject or focus of the learning somehow seemed secondary to the novelty it implies, as inferred by this participant:

“So, thriving for me would be not just doing the same task day in and day out it would be, you know, learning.”

Participant 11, Organisation B

Thus, the challenge inherent in the novelty and variety implied by learning appeared to increase the sense of contribution directly, but also served to reinforce other pertinent factors such as expertise, confidence and opportunities to measure progress. In this context, participants appeared to value the outcomes of learning more than the opportunity to learn. This was captured in this quote from a participant describing a time when they had been in a role for some time:

“I’m completely thriving because I know everything and that does give me a lot of confidence and less fear.”

Participant 4, Organisation B

Challenge was only one aspect of how participants described making a difference in this context. They also perceived that the work had some meaning to them, and this often came from a sense that their work connected to a greater good they viewed as worthwhile. A participant captured this:

“I think that’s part of thriving as well, that you see a benefit to something that’s wider than just for your personal gain.”

Participant 2, Organisation A

One participant describes a time when they were thriving as one where the opportunities were interesting and challenging, but also connected to their own values:

“Making a contribution to something that I value as very important to me.”

Participant 6, Organisation B

Another participant from Organisation A working in a scientific role captures this sense of supporting a greater cause, even in small ways:

“I can get a lot of satisfaction even if I feel that I’ve done something very simple ... if it is useful to what we’re trying to do.”

Participant 13, Organisation A

Participants gave numerous examples of projects that they felt did not provide meaning, and therefore detracted from their ability to thrive at work. One participant describes such a time:

“There’s no point sorting this out, it’s just an unnecessary mess and it can just carry on being an unnecessary mess because it’s all going nowhere.”

Participant 2, Organisation B

The process of attributing meaning appeared to differ across the two organisations and will be discussed later in this chapter, but the importance of being able to do was remarkably consistent. Whatever the source of meaning might be for these participants, the ability to find a link to a greater sense of purpose was perceived as important to their thriving at work, leaving them with the impression that what they were doing was ‘worthwhile’.

The participants’ accounts of thriving at work suggested that a sense of making progress was also an important factor in their perception that their

contribution was making a difference and their work mattered. The goal of the progress appeared almost secondary; for many participants, progress was perceived with greater significance than the achievement of a major milestone. In this quote, a participant described this sense of progress over achievement:

"I think once you've achieved success the thriving process is over ... thriving is when you actually feel like you're making progress towards achieving success."

Participant 11, Organisation A

Many participants believed that the journey towards the end result created the opportunity to thrive, as captured in the language of forward movement used by participants, in phrases such as "*moving forward*", "*pushing things along*" and "*having a direction of travel*" (Participant 5, Organisation A, Participant 10, Organisation A and Participant 10, Organisation B) and is a sentiment captured by this participant:

"If I feel like we've made progress then I feel like I'm thriving just that sense that we're not standing still, we're moving somewhere."

Participant 6, Organisation B

A smaller number of participants did mention achievement specifically and it was often mentioned alongside progress, rather than as an alternative. One participant describes the reward of knowing they have met a deadline:

"Even if no one said "well done you've hit the deadline", I knew I hit the deadline."

Participant 14, Organisation B

This also reflects the role of achievement as a form of validation for some, as illustrated by this participant:

“You’ve got the reward of knowing you’ve hit the deadline you’ve done a good job ... the deadline was enough, that was the feedback.”

Participant 14, Organisation B

Many participants described various other forms of validation that served to reinforce their belief they were making a difference. A combination of challenge and progress seemed to be one way in which internal validation was achieved, creating the opportunity for self-validation. This was often described by participants as a feeling they got as they recognised steps or milestones along the way. This participant had a very particular way of describing how they approached a big challenge in this way:

“I think I thrive by chunking it into small pieces and then having a little ‘yeah I’ve done that’ and then move to the next bit.”

Participant 4, Organisation A

Participants also described the role external validation played in the form of success, recognition, feedback and feeling valued by colleagues. While some perceived thriving at work and doing well as the same, most participants described success as one validator of the difference they were making. Of those that mentioned it, most defined success or doing well as achieving objectives, or getting things done. And the opportunity for validation is clear to this participant:

“If you have some clear objectives to meet and you meet them that does help, so whether that’s external or internal, that probably is the validation in itself by saying ‘we said we’d do these things and we’ve done them’.”

Participant 12, Organisation B

External validation also came from recognition and positive feedback received from participants’ line managers, and was often described as a way of validating their own sense of being successful and worthwhile. The nature of what was valued as recognition did vary among participants, but seemed consistently to include being told that they were doing a good job and that their work was valuable.

“I would also I would feel I was thriving if my manager or my boss thought I was doing a good job, probably gaining some good feedback.”

Participant 12, Organisation B

For many participants feeling valued by their co-workers and the team that worked for them was also perceived as important, as captured by this participant:

“It was people saying that you’re doing a good job and also that you could see that you were producing something.”

Participant 10, Organisation A

Frequently within these comments, the term *feedback* was used; however, on closer inspection, the emphasis was on positive feedback and recognition of contribution or expertise. This relates to the earlier theme of trust, specifically a sense of being trusted by colleagues, but in this context the feedback reinforced and validated the contribution the participant was making; it is one of the ways they assessed if they were making a difference and therefore thriving at work. This was summed up by a participant from Organisation B:

“Others perceiving the work that I was doing as valuable and good and interesting and innovative. I think that probably had quite a bit to do with it ... a bit of like that validation from others.”

Participant 12, Organisation B

One last form of validation relating to making a difference for many participants came from their role as a manager of a team, suggesting a connection to how much the team that worked for them were thriving. As the manager, they not only shared the results and progress of the team they were accountable for, but described the sense of achievement that came from helping others to thrive at work. This was described by one participant:

“It reinforces your belief that you’re doing something that’s powerful and is going to make a change ... if you can positively affect your people then that is a lot better for me than just positively impacting myself.”

Participant 14, Organisation A

This could be seen as a natural extension of the importance participants place on the role of their own line manager in this context. It is reasonable to assume that if a participant believes that their line manager’s behaviour makes a significant difference, they, in turn, contribute to the thriving of their team. This is summed up in this quote from a participant:

“Seeing that your team is also recognised and that they’ve had results and that they see themselves kind of progressing in that same way, it’s almost when they thrive, I thrive as well.”

Participant 9, Organisation B

The participants were all managers, and had been informed that the study was interested in managers, and yet, perhaps surprisingly, this was the only aspect of the managerial role that they explicitly volunteered as a contributor to their own thriving, and is supported by the perception of many participants that it is contingent on the rest of the team.

Interestingly, the overall theme of making a difference was often perceived by participants as an indicator of how they knew they were thriving at work, but they were just as likely to describe it as a contributing factor that enabled them to do so. Some captured the idea of a positive spiral between the two; the sense that they were making a difference at work generated thriving at work, which in turn enabled them to contribute at work with higher energy, enthusiasm and confidence, to make even more of a difference. This idea of a cumulative, iterative experience is one that is captured in the next theme and is described by this participant:

“I think there is a momentum to it ... it’s not only doing the work, but it’s being seen to do the work, and it’s that being recognised, and then you created a position kind of for yourself which is kind of justified and then you use that to kind of get on and do more things.”

Participant 6, Organisation B

5.3 Thriving at Work as an Upward Spiral

The experience of thriving at work and the process by which this was evaluated, appear to be interrelated, complex and nuanced. The term *spiral* was not used frequently, but there were a number of descriptions that created this sense of an upward, iterative and cumulative process, and incorporated an appraisal of

emotions. Participants described the small steps that accumulated over time in the context of progress, the thriving of the team that worked for them and trust, and these steps seemed to reinforce each other, creating the opportunity for more thriving. This was paired with an evaluation of their emotional state that seemed to mirror this iterative and cumulative process. As they took these steps, they built confidence, happiness, excitement and enthusiasm. This is captured in a description from one participant:

“I think there is a momentum to it It’s not only doing the work, but it’s being seen to do the work and it’s that being recognised and then you created a position kind of for yourself which is kind of justified and then you use that to kind of get on and do more things.”

Participant 6, Organisation B

The iterative nature of thriving at work was also captured in the earlier reference to the relationship to progress – one contributes to the other and vice versa. Progress felt good and added to their confidence. This then helped them to make more progress, and the cycle repeated.

Another example of the sense of a spiral came in participants’ suggestion that their ability to thrive and the thriving of their team reinforce one another. This iterative relationship was captured by this participant:

“because we’re all thriving it allows him to say that the team is thriving, so he’s thriving, he gives us space so we can thrive and again it’s all circular isn’t it?”

Participant 3, Organisation B

Many of the elements that people perceived as important were small in themselves such as day-to-day interactions or small signs of progress captured on a to-do list. One participant described this in the context of co-workers:

“I think for me, what I find looking back over the last 20 years ... the excitement and thriving comes from the smaller things, the interactions here and there.”

Participant 13, Organisation A

Another participant talked about the small steps that create trust among colleagues:

“You have to build up that trust ... once you’ve demonstrated that you have something to say or some value to add, I think it just builds over time.”

Participant 12, Organisation B

For many participants, these small steps added up to an experience of thriving at work. This cumulative effect is also reflected in participants’ perceptions of how they evaluated thriving at work. For many participants, this evaluation happened on a day-by-day basis. Of the few participants who did not describe a daily assessment, the sense was still of a regular check-in, suggesting that the evaluation was perceived by many as an assessment of how they felt over a relatively short period. Yet when asked to describe a time when they were thriving at work, all participants described roles or projects that happened over a longer period of months, suggesting that it was not a transient state that passed within a day. This potential disparity may indicate that thriving at work may be the result of a series of days or weeks that are assessed as good. As one participant explained:

“No matter how small the positive messages, you’re going to hang on to it and find the next one and build some sort of pattern.”

Participant 14, Organisation A

Interestingly, many participants also described how they knew they were thriving as a process of looking back on their recent experiences of work, but also looking forward and assessing what lay ahead. For many, a positive evaluation of both past and anticipated experience led them to this conclusion. It was also noticeable that participants often focused on how they felt in the morning, assessing their level of enthusiasm based on the day before, or excitement about the challenge of the day or week ahead. This was not necessarily a pattern of which they were consciously aware, but was implied by comments such as *“when I get up in the morning”* or *“as I drive to work”*. One participant described this process:

“It starts before I get to work, in the morning ... I’m on the way in and know what I’m going to be doing, I’m excited,”

Participant 9, Organisation B

It could be concluded that the answer to the question “am I thriving at work?” is simply a cognitive appraisal of the experience of work, evaluating doing well, experiencing success and being able to deliver on the challenges work presented. However, the last quote supports the analysis that suggests there is a powerful component of the evaluation based on an appraisal of their emotional state. Participants consistently expressed, both verbally and non-verbally, being energised, happy and excited, implying that the upward spiral may not only be iterative and cumulative, but also emotive, as captured by this participant:

“Being happy and being enthusiastic, I think it’s to do with the level of energy that I feel, an enthusiasm for what I’m doing.”

Participant 11, Organisation A

This excitement and energy appeared to enable the small steps that led to more thriving at work, creating the momentum implied by an upward spiral.

The emotive nature of the experience was further reinforced by participants’ perceptions of the relationship between thriving at work and thriving at home, as a strong emotional component to this dynamic can be identified in their responses. Most participants identified the possibility that it could spill over into their home lives and vice versa, expressing a desire to compartmentalise their work life and their home life in this context. For some participants, this presented an opportunity to protect the experience of work, suggesting it could sometimes be an escape or a helpful distraction from difficulties in their home lives. One participant described a time when a significant personal relationship was ending. In this context they described work as a ‘safe haven’ and a place where they could feel less emotional and upset. They did not suggest that this helped them solve the situation, or even handle it differently, but they appreciated the perceived ‘rest’ from emotional distress that their work created. Conversely, most participants mentioned a desire to take home the energy and enthusiasm thriving at work provided, but protect their home life when this was absent. Very few participants talked about this dynamic in the context of work-life balance, time, or distraction from their priorities at home. It seems that many were describing the potential for emotions and feelings to transfer from one domain to another:

“They influence each other quite a lot ... work is part of life, so it’s not a balance to be achieved, it’s kind of making sure that work is a worthwhile part of life.”

Participant 9, Organisation B

Thriving at work was perceived by many to help them thrive more generally, with participants describing the role it plays in overall wellbeing and happiness. This supports the idea that there is a strong emotional component to the experience and evaluation, and it may be this emotional component that builds and reinforces the upward spiral of thriving at work.

5.4 Differences Between the two Organisations and Demographic Groups

The final research question concerns differences in responses due to the nature of the organisation or demographic characteristics. Within the analysis of each theme nuances were identified between the responses of participants from the two very different organisations and across demographic groups. However these differences were subtle rather than substantive and outweighed by the consistency across the whole sample. This is noteworthy given the organisations were selected to represent two very different contexts and cultures, as described in Chapter 3.

The nuances in the way in which participants from the same organisation express their perceptions and experience of thriving at work within the integrative themes can be observed and described in three narratives that may relate to the very different nature of the organisations.

Firstly, the narrative around trust appeared to be slightly different across the two organisations. Participants from Organisation B, the public-sector organisation,

seemed more focused on avoiding mistakes and being supported, or even protected, by both their line manager and their co-workers if they did. They also appeared to care more about their personal relationship with co-workers. As a result, they valued the safety net provided by the relationships around them. One participant simply described it as:

"It's that thing about having one another's backs."

Participant 13, Organisation B

In Organisation A, participants were more likely to appreciate support from co-workers in the form of valuable advice and ideas, especially when the participant was faced with a new challenge. They also seemed less concerned with building personal relationships with co-workers, focused instead on positive attitudes and working well together.

This may reflect the different context between the two organisations. In Organisation A, mistakes may be considered part of the scientific process, whereas a mistake in the civil service may be more open to public scrutiny. As one participant put it:

"There are so many things in the civil service that actually could have a negative impact on thriving because we're so worried about what the Daily Mail would say."

Participant 4, Organisation B

The second area where the narrative may be different is the role of expertise and competence, as reflected in their perceptions of what constituted valued praise, that contributed towards thriving at work. Participants from Organisation B, the public sector civil service organisation, suggest they value praise from colleagues and

their managers that focuses on their expertise and knowledge but very few of the participants from the private sector Organisation A mentioned this as an aspect of thriving.

This difference may be connected to the role of expertise within each organisation also identified in Chapter 3. In Organisation A, most of the participants mentioned in their introduction that they were qualified to at least Masters level and many to PhD. The expertise they held was often specific to their field of endeavour and a pre-requisite to the role – it is almost taken for granted. Conversely, in Organisation B, participants often described working on a project with limited prior knowledge or relevant qualifications. Thus, their expertise is under scrutiny and becoming an expert is much valued. It may be that expertise in the scientific context is more of a 'given', is a significant part of why the person is in the role. In contrast, there was a sense that expertise must be 'earned' in this particular area of the Civil Service and participants often gave examples where they were placed in a role without significant prior knowledge. In this context, thriving often seemed to be connected to their ability to establish themselves as the expert on that area of policy.

“...being like a trusted, knowledgeable person on that chosen field, a policy that I was responsible for, so I clearly get a sense of worth and value from that kind of feedback,”

Participant 3, Organisation B

The third narrative that may reflect nuanced differences in the approach to thriving at work across the two organisations relates to the nature of meaning. Participants from Organisation A were more likely to talk about meaning in general

terms of a broader benefit, or the impact of their work on patient care. One participant described a strong personal connection to this sense of meaning:

“I’ve been touched throughout my life with people who have had various illnesses... so you know that’s what makes me passionate about coming here every day.”

Participant 6, Organisation A

Participants from Organisation B, who worked across several diverse areas of policy within the civil service, often perceived meaning to be just as important, but evaluated the opportunity for meaning in each project. One participant described what they do before embarking on a new project:

“You almost do a test of, is this work going to add something? Is this work going to be meaningful to me as well?”

Participant 9, Organisation B

It is possible that the clarity of purpose and singular focus of Organisation A made the attribution of meaning more consistent for those managers, and that the portfolio of projects within Organisation B created a need for a more selective and tailored approach. In other words both the nature of the work and the purpose of the organisation created a different process whereby meaning could be created by individuals.

Beyond the different narratives across the two organisations any analysis of differences between demographic groups can only be descriptive rather than conclusive, especially as there are so few instances whereby perceptions and experiences of thriving at work appear to differ. The nuances in gender, for example, are limited and do not seem to form a cohesive narrative. Female participants refer

more to the importance of the nature of the work and their success as an indicator of thriving at work and seem less concerned about being given freedom. This may relate to a higher perceived need among female participants to feel more in control that is also suggested by the data, but this cannot be determined from the analysis.

5.5 Overall Observations

The analysis of participants' responses led to some observations that are not captured within the integrative themes above but provide a more nuanced insight that is relevant to the discussion that follows this analysis. The general observations that follow capture both consistencies across contributions, but also the more subtle distinctions that may be lost in the identification of themes.

5.5.1 The salience of thriving at work.

Participants seemed to be able to access experiences of thriving at work, without seeking clarification of what was being asked of them or requesting a definition. The feelings of enthusiasm, excitement and confidence were described with a high level of consistency and did not appear challenging to articulate in the context of the interview. Every participant was able to describe a time when they had thrived at work. The information sheet informed participants that the researcher would be interested in times that they felt they were thriving at work and felt engaged and energised, but they were not asked to think of a specific example in advance, nor was it a pre-requisite of taking part. This does suggest that the experience may be accessible to most individuals if the right conditions are present. Participants were also able to remember and recollect times they were not thriving at work with equal ease.

5.5.2 The importance of the work itself.

It is interesting to note that participants described the time they were thriving in the context of a specific role, or a project they were working on that created the necessary conditions. These recollections appeared to begin and end with that particular project or job. Participants also appeared to talk more often about factors related to making a difference than they did about those related to mutual trust. This balance between the two is conveyed in a hierarchy chart generated by NVivo, that shows the number of coding references that are attributable to these integrative themes and the sub-themes, and this is provided in Figure 4. This should not be treated as a quantitative analysis, but may help to demonstrate the significance of this work.

Making a difference			Mutual trust	
Challenge	Progress	Ownership	Good relationships	Trusting in colleagues
External validation		Meaning	Feeling trusted	

Figure 4. A visual representation of the frequency of coding references within the integrative themes of making a difference and mutual trust.

5.5.3 The individual nature of thriving at work.

The analysis thus far reflects the commonality across perceptions and descriptions, but a more granular perspective highlights the individual differences that may be hidden within the integrative themes. It is also important to recognise that within the themes identified through this analysis, there was no single aspect of the experience that was mentioned by every participant. Similarly, the specific combinations of factors varied significantly, creating a unique description of their experience. Without introducing a quantitative paradigm of measurement and comparison, NVivo is able to take any two participants and highlight codes that were mutual and those that were not. Two participants from each organisation were randomly chosen for this purpose, and the results reflect the areas of commonality identified within this analysis, but also the individual differences. A visual representation of these comparisons is provided in Appendix H.

5.5.4 Limited perceptions of self-determination and agency.

The participants of this study did not describe their experience of thriving at work through the lens of agentic behaviour or self-determination. Participants were more likely to focus on the factors that were present, rather than the planned and intentional actions they took to create the opportunity. The questions asked in the interview may not have encouraged participants to discuss this aspect of the experience, and this limitation is discussed in the final chapter. However it is also possible that as the observer of their own story, participants do not perceive their

agency. This hypothesis has some credence when consideration is given to the descriptions provided by the participants of others whom they perceived to be thriving at work, which appeared to focus more on their behaviour. This participant provides one such observation:

“She is sucking in information from everywhere else, she is networking an awful lot and you can see that happening and thinking, ‘oh they’re doing that, I could be doing that’.”

Participant 1, Organisation A

Participants described others who they perceived as thriving at work as willing to take on new responsibilities and tasks, asking questions, and displaying a passion for their area of work.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

Overall, this analysis suggests three themes that capture a broader, perhaps more foundational, reflection of participants’ perceptions of thriving at work.

The first of these themes is mutual trust, which seems to be valued by so many participants in the context of the relationship with their line manager and their peers. It appears to be a key enabler, both in generating a sense of confidence, but also in presenting the freedom and safety that allows individuals to approach their work in a way that promotes their thriving. This sense of trust was mentioned both explicitly and implicitly by all participants in the context of their relationships at work, and often related to the quality of those relationships and an appreciation of expertise.

The second of these integrative themes capture a positive appraisal of making a difference, and this seems to go beyond recognition of specific achievements and formal performance reviews. Participants described how making a difference was important to thriving at work, and often talked about freedom that meant they could do work, and achieve results, that clearly belonged to them. The emphasis is given to progress as an internal feedback mechanism, along with recognition from both their line manager and their colleagues, also reflects this perception that their effort translated into a meaningful contribution that was recognisable both to themselves and others. Progress and the ability to attribute that progress to their own effort and be recognised for it seemed to translate into an overall sense that they mattered, and this made a significant contribution to participants' sense of thriving at work.

Finally, participants' descriptions of both the experience and evaluation of thriving at work suggest that it may be an upward spiral. All participants suggest they regularly monitor it and this evaluation appeared to be based on an appraisal of their levels of energy, enthusiasm, happiness and confidence; as well as the perception that they were in control, doing well and being successful.

The comparative analysis indicates nuanced differences that may relate to the nature of the organisation and the differences due to the demographics of participants, but these appear to be more subtle than substantial. The goal within the constructivist paradigm is not to generate results that are generalisable in the sense of robust conclusions about the broader working population. However, it may be reasonable to suggest that, given the differences between groups are not fundamental, most managers may be influenced by these broad integrative themes, while still validating the individual nature of the experience (Leung, 2015).

In the next chapter, this analysis is discussed in the context of the theoretical determinants of the extant literature and the research questions, before new theoretical perspectives are offered that have the potential to deepen the current understanding of the experience of thriving at work.

Chapter 6 – Discussion

In this chapter the themes identified in the analysis are considered in the context of other relevant constructs in order to establish that thriving at work is indeed unique and able to provide new insight. This is followed by a response to the first of the two research questions that asks how participants describe the experience of thriving at work. Through an exploration of the relationship to current theories and conceptualisations, the discussion challenges the assumptions inherent in the extant literature. The minimal role of cultural and demographic factors identified within the analysis informs a response to the second research question that asks if the descriptions of the experience of thriving at work affected by demographic factors or the nature of the organisation. Finally, an alternative conceptualisation of thriving at work is proposed that captures the experience of thriving at work for this group of managers and reflects the subtle influences of the organisation.

6.1 Thriving at Work as a Distinct Construct

The suggestion in the extant literature that thriving at work is different from other constructs related to work such as engagement or job satisfaction, is supported by the integrative themes identified in this study. Job satisfaction, for instance, is most frequently described as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state, resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke, 1969, p. 1304). Thriving at work does appear to incorporate the concept of appraisal, but this includes an evaluation of the emotional state, rather than construing it as an outcome. Furthermore, participants’ appraisal of the difference they are making

captures a broader set of factors than the experience of the job, as it connects to factors beyond the job itself, such as meaning and validation. This suggests that thriving at work may be a more dynamic, cumulative process than the concept of job satisfaction, and incorporate a broader range of variables.

Similarly, work engagement has been defined as an experience of vigour, dedication and absorption, based on the job and personal resources available (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Vigour can be related to the enthusiasm described by all participants, but dedication and absorption do not resonate with the descriptions provided by the participants in this study. This echoes the findings of Kleine et al. (2019), who raise concerns about divergent validity when compared to engagement, but conclude that thriving is unique and “exhibited incremental predictive validity beyond work engagement” (Kleine et al., 2019, in press, p. 38).

The emphasis on challenge in the participants’ responses creates some parallels with the concept of eustress, the positive side of stress (Selye, 1975). This concept is defined as a “healthy constructive outcome of stressful events and the stress response” (Hargrove, Nelson, & Cooper, 2013, p. 61) but appears to be more closely related to the concept of flow (Csikszentmihaly, 2002) as it is described as a positive psychological state of focus, mindfulness, immersion and being fully present (Nelson & Simmons, 2011). This singular focus does not resonate with participants’ descriptions, suggesting that, while they may have moments of eustress in response to a particular challenge when they are thriving at work, the experience goes beyond this specific response to a challenge in the moment.

Many participants volunteered descriptions of *not* thriving at work, to create a contrast or reinforce and expand on their perspective, though they rarely

mentioned *stress* or *burnout*. The experience was often described by participants as a lack of energy and enthusiasm, perhaps even boredom, which feeds a downward spiral of loss of confidence and lack of progress. This articulation of the opposite state is aligned to the concept of languishing (Keyes, 2002, cited in Spreitzer et al., 2005) and appeared to be the absence of specific experiences, factors and emotions, rather than the presence of negative experiences such as stress or burnout.

This discussion does not consider all concepts related to the experience of work as possible candidates for duplication, but a comparison to the influential theories of engagement, job satisfaction, eustress, stress and burnout, suggests thriving at work is sufficiently distinct to warrant further discussion. In all cases, there is some overlap, but it appears to be broader, more dynamic and more integrative than is captured in the constructs examined and cannot merely be defined as the opposite to, or even absence of, stress or burnout. Rather, it captures the positive experience of work from the individual's perspective, and involves an evaluation that is inherently personal.

It is also interesting to note that participants did not compare thriving at work to other constructs such as engagement or stress, even though, as managers in organisations with sophisticated HR practices, it is reasonable to assume that such terms are part of their lexicon. Strict conclusions cannot necessarily be drawn from this observation and no other studies have explicitly examined perceptions of the differences between the constructs, but it could be inferred that participants perceived it as distinct, perhaps seeing it as more beneficial and pertinent to the individual than the organisation.

Comparisons to constructs that are not directly related to work, but capture positive experiences in life more generally such as happiness, wellbeing and flourishing were not explored directly with participants in the interview. It is therefore possible that there may be congruence between them. Happiness is an ill-defined term (Seligman, 2012), but it is one that participants sometimes deployed when describing thriving at work. However “feeling happy” was perceived as only one of many indicators of thriving at work and it cannot be assumed that the transitory feeling of happiness at work translates into happiness beyond work. Wellbeing has been defined in a conceptual framework consisting of five dimensions of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment and Seligman (2012). Flourishing is described by the same author as the outcome of wellbeing (Seligman, 2012) and is defined as a combination of the core features of positive emotions, engagement, interest, meaning and purpose and the presence of at least 3 of the additional features of self-esteem, optimism, resilience, vitality, self-determination and positive relationships (Huppert & So, 2013).

Clearly the core features of both wellbeing and flourishing overlap with the integrative themes identified in this research. However thriving at work appears to capture aspects that are particularly pertinent to the world of work, such as mutual trust in the context of working relationships, challenge and progress. Furthermore, whilst there is a movement towards the integration of more uncomfortable aspects of life into these positive constructs (Held, 2004; Ivtzan et al., 2016; Sims, 2017), they do not currently capture the aspects of challenge and difficulty associated with the experience of thriving at work. Whilst aspects of both wellbeing and flourishing resonate with the experiences described by the participants in this study, it cannot

be concluded that flourishing at work is therefore the same construct as thriving at work. Exploration of this possible overlap would enhance the clarity of the definition of thriving at work and is identified as an area of further research in the final chapter.

6.2 Comparison to Extant Definitions and Theories

6.2.1 Doing well.

This analysis provides some support for the broad definition of thriving at work as doing well or being successful. Within the theme of making a difference, for instance, participants described the validation that comes from doing well and getting things done. The upward spiral suggests that success and doing well provided participants with confidence and enthusiasm that, in turn, enabled them to continue to thrive.

It could be argued that, for this group of participants, the experience of doing well is a self-fulfilling prophecy. As managers, they are all, to some degree, successful, as they have been promoted into supervisory positions. This research does not support this supposition however, as several participants did not perceive themselves to be doing well at the time the interviews took place. Approximately 40% of participants had been in the same role for more than 2 years and some described a sense of stagnation. This suggests that doing well and being successful cannot be assumed for this group, purely on the basis of their status as managers.

Thriving at work as doing well and being successful did not capture the more detailed descriptions provided by participants, and the integrative themes reflect many other aspects that were equally important, suggesting the experience goes well beyond this definition. Success and doing well may be part of the picture, but

this still falls short of describing the rich tapestry of factors captured within the integrative themes presented by this research.

6.2.2 A socially embedded experience of learning and vitality.

The experience of thriving at work as a combination of learning and vitality predominantly influenced by social context proposed by Spreitzer et al. (2005), is not fully upheld by the perspectives of these participants. Many other authors in the extant literature are both theoretically and empirically supportive of this two-dimensional construct, and did not analyse the two factors separately (Bensemmane et al., 2018; Cullen et al., 2018; Frazier & Tupper, 2018) but the findings of a small number of studies have challenged this assumption.

The qualitative aspect of Hennekam's (2017) mixed-methods study sought to understand how thriving at work varied over time for older workers starting a new job. Findings from this study led the author to suggest that the two factors of vitality and learning change over time, whereby thriving is initially assessed by the participants by their vitality, but three months later shifts to include a greater emphasis on the demands of the role, which may be linked to learning (Hennekam, 2017). Mortier et al. (2016), exploring the relationship between thriving at work and authentic leadership, did look at the two sub-constructs of vitality and learning separately, and found some differences across the two which could suggest they may not be linked in the way the theory suggests. Prem et al. (2017) similarly found the evaluation of challenge had a significant impact on learning, but not on vitality. The authors of these papers call for a greater exploration of the two factors at work, but the majority support future research on identifying more antecedents or outcomes,

rather than necessarily challenging the construct (i.e. Riaz et al., 2018; Russo et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the recent meta-analysis previously referenced suggests that the findings “do not allow definite conclusions about the role of the dimensions” and calls for further research on the validity of the construct (Kleine et al., 2019, in press, p. 44). This may not be surprising given the methodological bias previously identified towards validating an existing construct rather than questioning it, but there are indicators within the extant research that this is worthy of further exploration and this is supported by the data from this research.

Vitality, defined as energy and enthusiasm, was clearly and consistently expressed by the participants in this study and is reflected in the theme of the upward spiral. Learning, on the other hand, did not appear to be a primary indicator and was embedded in the notion of making a significant contribution, conveyed as a measure of challenge, progress and new experiences. This is quite different from the definition of learning proposed by Spreitzer et al. (2005) that focuses on the acquisition of new skills and personal growth. Interestingly, the nature of learning has also come under scrutiny in the meta-analysis conducted by Kleine et al. (2019), where the authors suggest there may be a difference between mastery goals and performance goals in this context, and highlight a distinction between a momentary sense of learning or a longer-term orientation towards learning goals. The authors go on to recommend that “further theorizing on the nature of the learning dimension of thriving at work is needed” (Kleine et al., 2019, in press, p. 42). Furthermore, in this study, participants did not consistently use language that conveyed the idea of a combination of learning and vitality. They were very likely to

mention vitality, but equally confidence, success and happiness were also given as indicators, and learning was much less prevalent.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) underpins this conceptual model of thriving at work and serves to reinforce the emphasis on personal growth and learning as a significant component of this definition (Spreitzer et al., 2005). The conditions of autonomy, competence and relatedness that enable growth proposed within SDT, can be found across all three integrative themes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Examples include the freedom allowed by their line manager, progress as an indicator of competence, and the importance participants place on relationships built on support and recognition. However, other significant factors such as meaning do not naturally align.

The role of SDT as a theoretical determinant of thriving at work is further undermined by the lack of significance given to the agentic behaviours that inform it. The role of agentic behaviours has not received much attention within the extant literature even though the definitions provided by SDT of task focus, exploration and heedful relating, are incorporated into Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) conceptual model. Only one study explored these agentic behaviours, with mixed results, suggesting a relationship between task focus, exploration and thriving at work, but not heedful relating (Niessen et al., 2012). The analysis of the data suggests that these agentic behaviours were not emphasised by participants in this study, although each can be implied within the integrative themes. Task focus and exploration are clearly captured in the emphasis on progress in the context of making a difference, while heedful relating relates to the theme of mutual trust. The difference appears to be that participants do not perceive these as agentic behaviours that they undertake to

create thriving at work. Rather, they see them as the conditions that enable them to thrive at work; when a task is inherently meaningful, progress is possible, and they have strong relationships with the people around them. Participants did not describe their role in creating those conditions, although they were more likely to observe such behaviours in others.

Interestingly, the authors of SDT also describe these three conditions as “need states” that “appear to be essential for facilitating optimal functioning of the natural propensities for growth and integration, as well as for constructive social development and personal well-being” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). This broader positioning of the role SDT plays in human functioning suggests that it is relevant to many aspects of the life experience. From this perspective, it would be reasonable to assume that the need states of autonomy, competence and relatedness will be reflected in participants responses, but this theoretical perspective may not provide insight that is as specific to thriving at work.

The second theoretical foundation within this definition of thriving at work that reinforces the emphasis on growth and learning is self-adaptation theory (SAT), that suggests a regular evaluation by individuals of whether they are moving in a positive direction in order to adapt if needed (Spreitzer et al., 2005; Tsui & Ashford, 1994). The importance given to both progress and feedback by participants is captured in the idea of an iterative evaluation and suggests experiences are required that allow participants to gauge how they are doing in order to thrive at work. This supports the relevance of SAT, but it is less able to encapsulate the accumulative effect of these evaluations that create an upward spiral.

From the perspective of the participants, there can be little doubt that they recognise and value the role of social factors in thriving at work. The integrative theme of mutual trust partially supports Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) assertion that people are more likely to thrive in specific social contexts and several findings in the integrated literature review, particularly those clustered around the importance of the supervisor in creating the right environment and relationships with colleagues. This is further reinforced by the suggestion that the validation of others and the validation inherent in creating a thriving team informs the appraisal that they are making a difference. Participants were much less likely to provide descriptions of organisational or cultural attributes, suggesting that they are less aware of such influences if they do exist, and more focused on the direct relationships with the people they work with.

This finding partly resonates with the deployment by Spreitzer et al. (2005) of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), that emphasises the evaluation of social factors and social comparisons as a precursor to agentic behaviour (Bandura, 2001). Day-to-day social dynamics do appear to influence thriving at work, as illustrated by the importance of external validation and mutual trust, although social comparison was rarely mentioned. It is possible that participants felt it undesirable and, consciously or unconsciously, avoided such references but the role of SCT is further undermined by the previously discussed lack of emphasis on agentic behaviour within the participants' descriptions.

Both SDT and SCT are theories that seek to predict how people behave in different social contexts and are influenced in consistent ways by changes in that context. This analysis found the individual differences were more pronounced than

those that could be potentially attributed to the contrasts existing between different organisations or demographic groups. The differences that may exist between the participants of the two organisations were subtle and related to how a specific aspect was expressed or valued. Interestingly, they may also relate to differences that go beyond the culture of the organisation and reflect even broader societal dynamics. Similarly, the differences that could potentially be attributed to demographic distinctions were limited in this group of participants, which may even seem counter-intuitive, given the extensive literature highlighting such differences in the workplace (Mazei et al., 2015; McCord, Joseph, Dhanani, & Beus, 2018; Rauschenbach, Krumm, Thielgen, & Hertel, 2013).

One further characteristic that distinguishes this group of participants in the social context is their role as managers. One quantitative study in the extant literature that explicitly compared thriving at work for managers and non-managers found no significant differences (Porath et al., 2012), and this group of participants would appear to broadly support this perspective. The role of managing others was not a dominant theme in this analysis and relationships with co-workers and the participant's own line manager appeared to be as important as the relationships with the team they managed. Interestingly, references to the role of leading a team were more prevalent among the participants who led larger teams, in particular the two participants who had teams of over 100 people. The majority of participants managed relatively small teams and this aspect of their role may not be perceived as dominant.

However, many aspects of thriving at work mentioned by participants are inherently linked to their role as managers, not just as a supervisor of others, but

also as individuals who are accountable for multiple complex, longer-term, inter-dependent projects that involve levels of risk and ambiguity. Thus, the emphasis across all the themes on freedom, support from co-workers, challenge and progress, may be attributable to the nature of their role. It is also possible that this analysis is more informative about the type of people who are attracted to such roles, rather than the role itself. Further qualitative exploration of the experience of non-managers and different managerial roles across a variety of organisations would be needed in order to fully understand the influence of managing others on all aspects of thriving at work.

In summary, the analysis of the perspectives provided by the participants in this study provides limited support for the socially embedded model of vitality and learning. The emphasis on learning does not appear to resonate with the experience of these participants and, while social factors are perceived to be significant, they appear to be influenced less by broader social factors or social comparison and more by the iterative and cumulative impact of day-to-day interactions with colleagues that build trust and provide validation over time. In this context, the theories of self-determination, self-adaptation and social cognition may not provide the strongest foundation from which to understand thriving at work. This raises the question of whether the experience described by participants in this study is the same experience that is explored in the extant literature. In the next section, the extent to which the experience of the participants in this study captured in each integrative theme resonates with the empirical findings of the extant literature is explored, and alternative theories that can incorporate the relevant findings of the extant literature and the insight generated from this study are proposed.

6.3 New Theoretical Perspectives on the Integrative Themes

The discussion so far suggests that the current theoretical perspectives underpinning the definition of thriving at work in the extant literature do not fully reflect the experience of managers interviewed in this study and a more robust construct that captures the findings of this study is needed in order to “reground the notion” before evaluating its future potential (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019).

In order to achieve this the integrative themes will be compared and contrasted with the findings of the extant literature to ascertain if there is enough similarity to assume some overlap in construct between what has been examined in this study and the research so far. Each theme will then be subject to a *second-order analysis* that seeks to “derive an explanatory framework to put the story into a more theoretical perspective” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 435). In their description of sensemaking and sensegiving, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) distinguish between first-order analysis that identifies the themes expressed by the participants and a second-order analysis that enables the theory to emerge from this data. This approach aligns with the social constructivist paradigm that underpins this research as the theory does not drive the collection of the data, but evolves from it.

In this context, the analysis of Chapter 5 generated the integrative themes of mutual trust, making a contribution and the upward spiral and represents the first-order analysis. The second-order analysis requires an examination of the themes for “underlying theoretical explanatory dimensions” which may not be apparent to the participants in the study and provides an “alternative way of seeing the phenomenon” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 438). In the following sections the connections between the dimensions informing the first-order integrative themes

and the theoretical explanation offered is made explicit in order to provide a strategic platform for a new conceptualisation of thriving at work.

6.3.1 Mutual trust and psychological safety.

The integrative theme of mutual trust captured specific behaviours, in the context of day-to-day relationships with co-workers, the people they manage and the line manager, that have the potential to contribute to thriving at work. In particular, the role of the manager in both empowering and supporting the individual was significant, and a balance between the two was required. Participants perceived the freedom they were given as an indicator of their line manager's trust in them, but also wanted to know they were there for support if needed. Too much freedom could be perceived as a lack of interest, and too much support could be seen as micro-managing. Similarly, with co-workers and the people who reported to them, participants valued both the recognition of competence and being recognised as worthy of their trust, and the knowledge that colleagues could be trusted for support if necessary. These behaviours appear to create the conditions that enable individuals to feel confident to take on new challenges and able to try new things.

This theme resonates with a number of findings in the extant literature. A relationship between thriving at work and supervisory support (Paterson et al., 2014), social connection and belonging (Gkorezis et al., 2013), and trusting relationships (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009) has been suggested within the quantitative paradigm. Furthermore, the relationship between trust and the resultant confidence to take on new challenges and try new things described by participants, is reflected in further quantitative studies that suggest it is a mediator between both connectivity and the quality of the relationship with the manager and innovative

behaviour (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017; Xu et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2019).

In their quantitative study of the relationship between psychological capital and thriving at work, Paterson et al. (2014) specifically relate the behaviours of the supervisors who create the perception of support, to a safe environment where employees are “not afraid to take risks, or even fail” (Paterson et al., 2014, p. 438). However, each relationship has been introduced to the existing literature independently and the integrative nature of this analysis suggests that the specific foci of each study may not reflect how they may interact with each other to create the overall social environment that fosters trust and enables individuals to thrive at work.

The theoretical perspective of psychological safety, which can be defined as a belief that it is safe to take interpersonal risks in the context of relationships at work (Edmondson & Lei, 2014), is better suited to assimilating the various sub-themes that constitute this theme of mutual trust. The sub-themes of this integrative theme presented in table 6, Chapter 5 are re-presented in table 8 to facilitate comparison to the theory of psychological safety.

Table 8. Sub-themes of Mutual Trust as a Foundation of Thriving at Work

Integrative Theme: Mutual Trust as a Foundation of Thriving at Work	
Sub-theme (level 2)	Sub-theme (level 3)
Good relationships	Getting on with line manager Being part of a cohesive team
Feeling trusted	Line manager empowers Recognised by colleagues Recognised by line manager
Trusting in colleagues	Competent colleagues Co-workers' support Line manager's support

When individuals believe they are psychologically safe they are more likely to communicate openly and give and receive feedback (Pearsall & Ellis, 2011), respect others' competence, have positive intentions, feel safe to take on challenges and experiment with new approaches (Edmondson, 1999). The research also reflects the essence of this integrative theme, that suggests high-quality relationships that are both mutual and based on positive regard, defined as a sense of being valued, respected and appreciated, are associated with high levels of psychological safety (Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009).

Although psychological safety is similar to trust, it focuses on beliefs about how a group operates, rather than on how one person views another (Newman, Donohue, & Eva, 2017). This resonates with the perceptions of the participants in this study as individuals who described their relationships in the context of a group of colleagues rarely mentioned specific individuals other than the manager. Interestingly, psychological safety has been considered as a team construct, and a meta-analysis of the research in this area suggests a relationship between team performance and learning, suggesting the manager plays a significant role in ensuring the conditions that make it possible (Carmeli et al., 2009; Roussin, MacLean, & Rudolph, 2016). This sense of a team environment that fosters thriving at work and is created by the behaviours and beliefs of the individual, their colleagues and the line manager, resonates strongly with the analysis presented in the previous chapter and captured in the mutuality of the behaviours that build trust.

In a meta-analysis of 83 studies of psychological safety, antecedents were identified that reflect aspects of the factors mentioned by participants, that

appeared to create mutual trust; supportive leadership behaviours, quality of relationship networks and team characteristics (Newman et al., 2017). The outcomes associated with psychological safety were communication, learning, performance, innovation, creativity and positive attitudes towards the team and the organisation. It is more difficult to connect these outcomes to the concept of thriving at work as described by the participants in this study, in part because participants were not asked specifically to describe outcomes. The review also identified two further characteristics that appear to align with this analysis. Firstly, individual variations in both antecedents and outcomes of psychological safety were apparent. Secondly, it identifies a spiral-like experience, whereby a self-reinforcing dynamic between the behaviour that is engendered by psychological safety that leads individuals to help and support colleagues and stimulate learning and development, in turn, creates greater psychological safety (Newman et al., 2017).

Psychological safety has also been identified within three studies of thriving at work in the context of an antecedent (Frazier & Tupper, 2018; Jiang, Hu, et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2019), and, when combined with the eight studies that focus on trust as a condition for risk-taking, creativity and thriving, a pattern starts to emerge that supports the role of psychological safety in thriving at work (Bensemmane et al., 2018; Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Frazier & Tupper, 2018; Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017; Spreitzer et al., 2012; Sumsion, 2004; Xu & Wang, 2019; Xu et al., 2017).

Psychological safety may not be the only pertinent theoretical construct of relevance, but it does appear to capture the essence of the theme of mutual trust. Consideration was given to the relevance of the psychological contract, defined as the subjective and normative perceptions beyond formal aspects of employment,

that create a set of expectations and obligations between employee and employer (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006; Rousseau, 2001). Whilst this captures some aspects of the mutual, social and interpersonal nature of mutual trust (Atkinson, Barrow, & Connors, 2003; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998; Tekleab & Taylor, 2003), there is also general consensus that the psychological contract is concerned with the reciprocal promises and obligations between the employee and the employing entity (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006). Participants did not appear to focus on such expectations and obligations as they described their experience of thriving at work. The manager could be considered a representative of the employing entity, but most of the participants had both thrived and not thrived, within the same organisation, suggesting a relationship that is more specific. Other authors describe the importance of factors such as effort, loyalty and capability from the employee, along with organisational inducements such as pay, promotion and job security (Conway & Briner, 2002; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Again, these factors had not been mentioned by participants, suggesting the psychological contract may not be the most informative framework for understanding thriving at work, particularly when compared to the concept of psychological safety.

6.3.2 Making a difference and the relationship to meaningful work.

The second theme of making a difference as a generator of thriving at work encapsulated participants' perceptions that they were being challenged, in an area to which they felt ownership and could ascribe meaning. Moreover, the evaluation that led to this conclusion was informed by the internal validation of progress and the external validation that came from a participant's sense they were doing well, receiving recognition, and helping the team that works for them to thrive.

The extant literature supports many aspects of this integrative theme, and the integrated review in Chapter 3 identifies a group of findings across both the qualitative and quantitative traditions associated with responsibility for meaningful work. Indeed, many of these studies also suggested that a blend of ownership, challenge and the ability to find meaning in the work contributed to thriving (i.e. Hennekam, 2017; Ling et al., 2014; Prem et al., 2017). The sense of internal validation reflected in the experience of many participants as they describe the importance of progress in this context is supported by several sources identified in the integrated literature review that proposed an appraisal of the current experience at work might be a factor influencing thriving at work (Kira & Balkin, 2014; Ling et al., 2014; Paterson et al., 2014; Prem et al., 2017; Spreitzer et al., 2005). This is further supported by Paterson et al.'s (2014) perspective that psychological capital may be a determinant, defined as a combination of an optimistic and positive appraisal of challenge and belief in success based on effort. The external validation of recognition that contributes to this theme is also identified as an important feature (Sim et al., 2016; Sumsion, 2004), although this is in the context of constructive relationships, rather than the validation of contribution. This does suggest that the experience of the participants in this study resonates with this construct as studied in the extant literature, but this analysis finds support for the need to bring together these findings into one integrative theme.

Even though the findings of the extant literature do reflect many characteristics of work that inform the sense of making a difference articulated by participants, the earlier discussion identified that this emphasis on a meaningful contribution is not fully reflected in the theoretical perspectives, or integrated within

the empirical studies informing the extant literature. Thus, a suitable theoretical perspective is required to inform a greater understanding of this integrative theme. Although neither job satisfaction nor engagement fully captured the breadth of thriving at work, they could be worthy candidates for this role as they do focus on the characteristics of the work itself. However, none of these available constructs accurately reflect the combination of meaning, ownership, progress and validation that this theme describes.

Meaningful work seems to be a stronger candidate, and is a construct that has evolved from being understood as a simple judgment that work is worthwhile (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) into a multidimensional construct that incorporates aspects of helping others or contributing to the greater good (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). It is related, but different from the attribution of meaning, which is a cognitive process of attributing value and can, therefore, have positive, negative or neutral valence (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). The sub-themes of this integrative theme presented in table 6, Chapter 5 are re-presented in table 9 to facilitate comparison to the theory of meaningful work.

Table 9. Sub-themes of Making a Contribution

Integrative Theme: Making a Contribution	
Sub-theme (level 2)	Sub-theme (level 3)
Challenge	Difficulty Learning
Meaning	Vision or long-term goal Work contributes to the greater good
Ownership	Line manager empowers (creates ownership) Work linked to identity
Progress	
Validation	Achievement Doing well, success Recognised by colleagues Recognised by line manager Leading a thriving team

The concept of meaningful work has been the subject of critical review in recent years (Bailey, Yeoman, Madden, Thompson, & Kerridge, 2018; Both-Newabuwe, Dijkstra, & Beersma, 2017; Lysova, Allan, Dik, Duffy, & Steger, 2019). These reviews suggest that important gaps in understanding still exist, and there is a level of contention across different disciplines such as psychology, philosophy and theology, that has impeded the creation of a single consistent construct. Yet there is broad agreement that meaningful work has an important role to play in changing work patterns and that it is “an experience that is amenable to influence by job design, leadership and management styles, work cultures and workplace relationships and is associated with a range of positive individual and organizational outcomes” (Bailey et al., 2019, p. 482). Furthermore, a recent meta-analysis of the outcomes associated with meaningful work indicated that it is a different construct than work engagement, job satisfaction and commitment (Allan, Batz-Barbarich, Sterling, & Tay, 2019). This analysis of 44 studies supports a model that positions meaningful work as a predictor of all three, which, in turn, predicts job performance, turnover and organisational citizenship behaviour (Allan et al., 2019). More recently, a review of the current research on the topic led to the proposal of a unifying definition of meaningful work as “the subjective experience of existential significance resulting from the fit between the individual and work” (Both-Newabuwe et al., 2017, p.12).

This definition resonates with the response from participants in this study, reflected in this integrative theme, and there are many characteristics of meaningful work identified within the literature that look beyond the most obvious connection to the importance of meaning. Firstly, meaningful work has also been related to skill

variety, autonomy and job feedback (De Boeck, Dries, & Tierens, 2019), reflecting participants' perceptions of the salience of learning through new experiences, challenge (which is partly created by freedom and empowerment) and validation. Secondly, it has been described as a "motivational force that propels people toward goal-directed behaviours and leads to positive affective states" (Allan et al., 2019, p. 503). This resonates with the emphasis on progress towards goals, rather than achievement of goals, within this theme. Thirdly, it has been suggested that work is considered to be meaningful when individuals are able to "act in ways that fulfil values that are relevant to their existence and explain why their work is worth doing" (Allan, Autin, & Duffy, 2014, p. 543; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). This suggestion is of particular interest, given that the way meaning is understood or evaluated, appeared to differ across the two organisations. It is possible that this distinction may reflect the personal values that attracted the participants to two entities with such different purposes.

Finally, the integrative literature review revealed that meaningful work "is raised beyond a sense that it is an immediate response to what is happening here and now but rather is enmeshed in a wider temporal landscape" (Bailey et al., 2019, p. 496), and builds over time to create a belief system (Allan et al., 2019). This suggests that the belief that work is meaningful for an individual is generated by a series of evaluations that accumulate over time to create this conclusion. This aligns with the integrative theme that is still to be discussed: the iterative, cumulative and affective nature of thriving at work.

6.3.3 Upward spiral of thriving at work, psychological safety and meaningful work.

The final theme captures the iterative, cumulative and affective experience of thriving at work. Participants describe with high levels of consistency the feelings of enthusiasm, excitement and confidence they experienced, and connect these affective aspects to the more cognitive appraisal of progress as they move forward in an area of work that matters to them. This combination of the cognitive and affective is instrumental in Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) definition in particular, but the iterative and cumulative aspects of this notion have received limited empirical and theoretical attention in the extant literature.

This particular theme reframes the potential tension between the conceptualisation of thriving at work as either a response, a process, or an outcome, that has been identified as a key debate in the literature on stress (Cohen et al., 1997) and the subject of increased focus over the last two decades. This theme suggests that participants' experiences incorporate all three, undermining the existence of meaningful distinctions between these categories from their perspective. For the participant, the experience integrates the response to a set of factors, the process by which this is evaluated, and the outcomes that create further opportunities for thriving.

One study that looked specifically at the process and frequency of evaluation did focus on the daily variations in thriving at work (Niessen et al., 2012), but, for this particular group of participants, the process may be more complicated than this implies. Many of the participants in this study described carrying out this evaluation daily, but it also appears to be a state that is consistent over time. This consistency

over time was reflected in the duration of the episodes that participants chose to describe which were all over a number of months. This was true for the small number of participants who described themselves as currently thriving at work, and for those who were relying on their memory of past experiences.

The discussion with participants about the relationship between work and home informed, in part, the emotional component of this integrative theme. The limited and somewhat disjointed commentary on this subject in the extant literature is reflected in the diversity of the participants' perspectives, and therefore the commonality between the experience of the participants and the findings in the extant literature is difficult to identify. Approximately half the participants felt it was possible to experience too much thriving at work, whilst the remaining half perceived something closer to Wendt et al.'s (2011) view of an empowering resource. Despite these differences, participants consistently described two specific relationships between thriving at work and home. Thriving at work was perceived by many to help them thrive more generally, and this supports the findings of the only quantitative study that suggests a relationship between thriving at work and overall wellbeing and happiness (Porath et al, 2012). Many in this study also perceived that when things were difficult outside of work, the workplace could provide a haven, or distraction, from those challenges. The emotional dynamic identified as an element of the iterative and cumulative experience of thriving at work for this group of participants may go some way toward explaining this pattern, and suggests that this may create resources that are beneficial beyond work, even if only as a protective factor. This aligns with the concept of psychological capital identified as a determinant of thriving at work by Paterson et al. (2014).

Given that both psychological safety and meaningful work have been described in ways that suggest they are iterative, cumulative and affective, it may not be necessary to identify a specific theoretical lens through which to understand this third integrative theme. The sub-themes are presented in table 6, Chapter 5 and re-presented in table 10 to facilitate this conclusion.

Table 10. Sub-themes of The Upward Spiral

Integrative Theme: Upward Spiral	
Sub-theme (level 2)	Sub-theme (level 3)
Progress*	
Doing well, success*	
Leading a thriving team*	Contributed to others thriving*
How thriving is evaluated	Looking back Looking forward Daily Less often
Emotional evaluation	Energy, excitement and enthusiasm Happiness Confidence
Compartmentalise home and work	Home impacts on work Work impacts on home

The characteristics of the two theoretical constructs already identified, and the interplay between them, may be sufficient, particularly since any further theoretical input might be likely to create unnecessary complexity without adding significant insight. This conclusion is supported by the sub-themes that also appear in the theoretical discussion of psychological safety and meaningful work. These replicated sub-themes speak to the content that drives the upward spiral, rather than the process of emotional and cognitive evaluation that supports it. This suggests that the factors that create the upward spiral are already captured in the theoretical explanation created by the second-order analysis of the first two themes.

6.4 A Different Conceptualisation of Thriving at Work

Given the questions raised in this discussion about the relationship between the perceptions of this group of participants and the theories that currently dominate the literature, the constructs of psychological safety and meaningful work are proposed as the theoretical foundations that inform a new conceptualisation of the phenomenon for managers. There are also three assertions that became apparent through this analysis and discussion that should be captured in this new conceptualisation of thriving at work.

Firstly, the priority an individual allocates to each of these factors varies significantly and seems to create an almost unique “code” that combines various elements to create their own definition and experience. Much of the extant literature assumes that thriving at work is not just a social construct, but one that is assumed to be contextualised by the employing organisation, has benefits for the organisation and can potentially be influenced by the employer. It is situated, therefore, broadly in the organisational development and management or leadership domain, and is, either explicitly or implicitly, used to explore a consistent phenomenon that can allegedly be measured and improved. This study has demonstrated how, contrary to findings from the wider literature, the emphasis on outcomes associated with business performance is not as salient to participants as has been implied. Participants tended to focus on the cumulative and iterative small wins that denote progress, leading to increases in confidence and enthusiasm, as opposed to the achievement of larger corporate goals. Focussing on a construct that is uniquely individual to each person, and defining it using the language and

frameworks that reflect the perspective of the person rather than the organisation, may present new opportunities to explore this important phenomenon.

Conversely, the second assertion recognises the consistency within the integrative themes across the two different organisations and demographic groups, and any differences that may be attributable to these broader social influences are outweighed by the shared experience of thriving at work that participants in this study discussed. This is a significant finding that challenges the extant definitions and suggests a theoretical explanation of thriving at work has the potential to be relevant to a broad constituency. A conceptualisation that focused exclusively on the individual perspective would, therefore, miss the opportunity for organisations, and society more generally, to support thriving at work based on an understanding of an underlying theoretical framework.

Finally, any conceptualisation of thriving at work must reflect the inter-connected, inter-personal and intra-personal nature of the three integrative themes identified in this study. The themes identified within the findings of the extant literature and described in Chapter 3 resonate with the analysis of this research: the importance of the supervisor in creating the environment, high-quality relationships and responsibility for meaningful work and outcomes that impact on organisational performance. However, this analysis captures a more connective set of contributors than those reflected in the extant literature and greater insight into the specific and often inter-personal behaviours that generate thriving at work. Current conceptual models do not fully capture these three aspects of the experience and any new conceptualisation should encourage exploration of how the factors inter-relate and are embodied in behaviour, to create the conditions that suit the individual.

A new concept of thriving at work for managers is proposed that incorporates these observations and reflects the theoretical perspectives of psychological safety and meaningful work, so as to capture the integrative themes of mutual trust and making a contribution that appear to enable an upward spiral. This is represented in Figure 5.

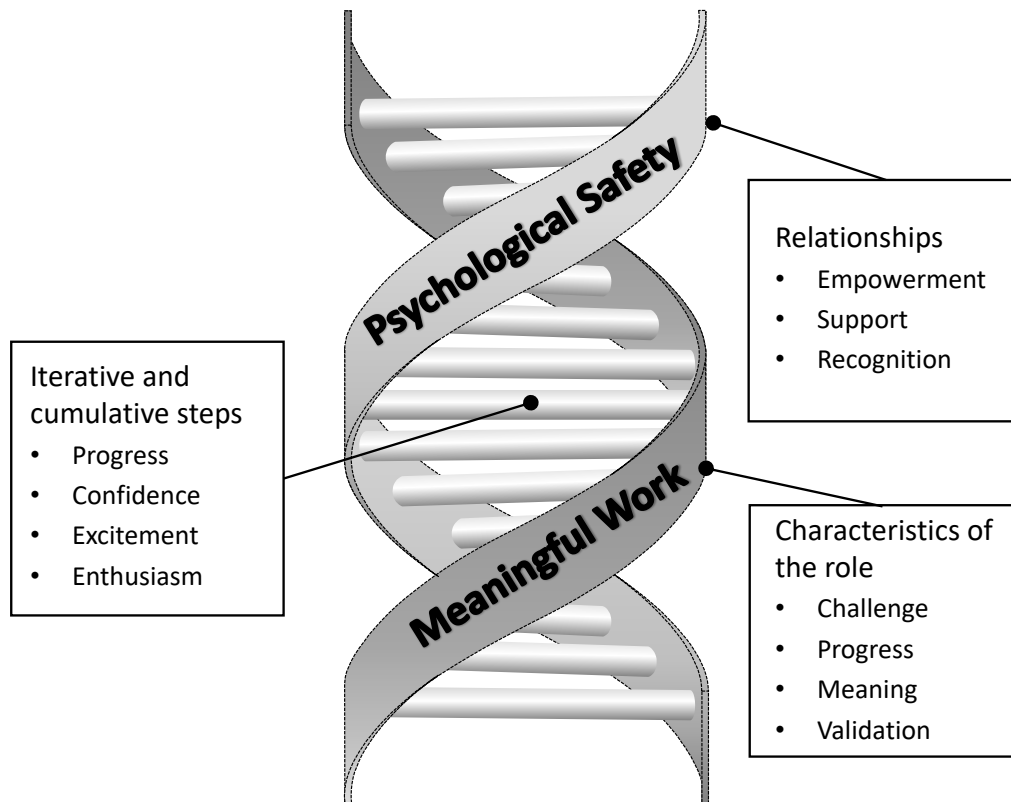


Figure 5. Thriving at work for managers as the DNA helix.

The model is represented by the helix of DNA, as this analogy captures both the consistency of the experience and the individual code that reflects each participant's perspective. Without stretching the analogy too far, it is also known that DNA does, to a limited extent, change in response to the environment and over time. In this context, the culture of the organisation may be influencing thriving at work in two different ways. Firstly, the organisation can provide an environment for managers that enables psychological safety and meaningful work, while focusing on

the small steps that lead to thriving at work. While this research suggests that this happens in the day to day interactions with their supervisor and other colleagues, and the small wins rather than significant achievements, this is not to suggest that an organisation cannot play a role in supporting the specific behaviours that are captured within these themes. Secondly, this research suggests that the organisational context provides the opportunity to tailor such initiatives. The different narratives between the two organisations in this study appeared to reflect the differences between the scientific endeavour and the project orientation of the civil service department or the dynamics of the external environment in which they operated. This was exemplified in different perceptions of competence and expertise between scientists and generalists, how meaning was created based on the purpose of the organisation, and the significance of making mistakes that creates very different consequences for those working in the public sector compared to an experimental laboratory.

This conceptualisation of thriving at work supports a continued emphasis on the understanding of a manager's experience, with a focus on the specific behaviours that make a difference and are open to influence by an organisation. Future research could build on our understanding of a resource available to individuals (Prosser et al., 2013; Wendt et al., 2011), but would emphasise the individual's desire and opportunity to improve their own ability to thrive at work, rather than a consistent and fixed concept. A similar opportunity was identified in a recent qualitative study of well-being in the context of job loss, which identified well-being as "a pluralistic concept which naturally eludes precise definition and operationalization" and

“strongly suggests there is no one-size-fits-all theory” (Synard & Gazzola, 2017, p. 259).

6.5 Concluding Remarks

The responses of the participants in this study provide further insight into many of the questions identified within the literature review, and challenge the prevalent theoretical model in the extant literature. The three integrative themes provide a new perspective on how individuals experience thriving at work, and suggest that the theoretical perspectives of psychological safety and meaningful work may provide new insight, while capturing the themes identified in the findings of the extant literature. Finally, a new conceptual approach is proposed that encapsulates the key findings of this study, and creates the opportunity for interplay between meaningful work and psychological safety that is unique to each individual and has the potential to create an upward spiral. This theoretical perspective opens up new areas of research and creates some practical implications that will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

7.1 Limitations of this Research

The methodological limitations of the literature review for this study were identified in Chapter 3, but the methodology and methods of the rest of the study also created limitations. There is some convergence towards an alternative to the scientific aspiration for objective and replicable knowledge in the context of studies involving the interpretation of data exploring experiential concepts (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008; Symon & Cassell, 2012). The rigour of any qualitative inquiry is not suited to validation techniques such as inter-rater reliability and replicability, which may ensure a study is considered valid and reliable, but “at the cost of losing all the richness and creativity inherent in analysis, ultimately producing a superficial product” (Morse, 1997, p. 445).

Within the qualitative paradigm, a process of verification that is concerned with the adequacy and appropriateness of the data, provides an alternative approach to rigour (Morse, 2018). Such verification involves procedures for “enhancing, evaluating, and demonstrating the quality of qualitative research”, and can be supported by critical reflection across four dimensions: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance (Yardley, 2000; 2017, p. 295).

Sensitivity to context encourages the researcher to be aware of the participants’ settings and contexts, as it may influence both what they say and how the researcher interprets it. In this study, sensitivity to context began with the care taken at the recruitment stage to consider the perspective of the prospective

subjects in order to address any concerns they may have about issues of confidentiality, anonymity, use and storage of their data in the research design, communications and consent process. Great care was then taken by the researcher to establish rapport at the beginning of the interview and ensure the environment and structure for the interview was conducive to open discussion. A limitation of this sensitivity was the involvement of the employing organisation required for this particular research design. Although every effort was made in the communications with the target population to minimise any fears, it is possible that some potential participants did not step forward or that the involvement of their employer influenced their responses in some way.

Commitment and rigour are described by Yardley (2017, p. 295) as an “in-depth engagement with the topic” that pervades all aspects of the research and the protocols followed in this study supported this endeavour. Within the constructivist paradigm, the semi-structured interview requires a balance between consistent questioning to explore specific areas in-depth, and a level of flexibility to adapt and respond to the participants’ input. The interview guide was designed to facilitate this balance, and the use of the critical incident technique, in particular, allowed the interview to both deeply engage with the experience of the participant, while staying focused on the areas for exploration identified within the literature review. As always within the qualitative paradigm, there is also potential tension between in-depth exploration of a phenomenon and the desire to examine similarities and differences between experiences, reflected in the sample size. The sample size of 30 sought to minimise this tension, but it is possible that fewer participants may have enabled deeper engagement. With this being said, the interviews all appeared to run

their natural course, were not constrained by time, and gave each participant a chance to add anything further they felt was relevant to their own experiences of thriving at work. One constraint on deep engagement was created by the recruitment of volunteers, as it is reasonable to assume that they were interested in the topic. This assumption is reinforced by the very high conversion rate from expressing interest to agreeing to interview after receiving the participant information sheet, and the ability of all participants to readily describe a time they had thrived at work. The perspective of subjects who were not interested in thriving at work, or were not able to readily remember a time they had thrived, was therefore not captured.

Transparency and coherence were supported by an audit trail, as all decisions were recorded at each stage of the research process (Morse, 2018). The reflexive journal was an essential element of each stage of the research, and sought to capture how the researcher's decisions about the research process and the data developed over time, as well as to ensure that this was not overtly influenced by their own opinions and bias. This was particularly important given the research was carried out by a single researcher, and in this context, the ability to show "the procedures that have led to a particular set of conclusions" (Seale & Silverman, 1999, p. 158) could be considered a strength of this research. However, it is possible that the emphasis on reducing bias is more suited to the positivist paradigm and undermines the role of the researcher as an active participant in the process, implied by the constructivist paradigm. From this perspective, reflexivity is reframed to provide an opportunity to "contextualize and enrich research processes and outputs", rather than minimise or ideally remove the researcher's perspective

(Gough, 2017, p. 311). In defining the methods of this research, there was an explicit goal to minimise subjectivity and bias and remove, as much as possible, the ideas and perspectives of the researcher. It could be argued that greater awareness of the researcher's opinions would have enabled this influence to be articulated and this perspective incorporated into the insight generated, and this is something which could perhaps inform future studies on this topic.

The impact and importance of this research are perhaps best assessed by the influence it could have on future research and practice that is identified later in this chapter. The new model of thriving at work introduced as a result of the insight generated does create new directions and perspectives, but it could be argued that the influence and impact of this research is constrained by an idiographic approach that emphasises "the messiness and complexity of human life" (Smith & Sparkes, 2009, p. 7). As a result, the focus of inquiry was the self-reported experience of participants, and the interview was designed to enable participants to talk about what they felt was most relevant (King, 2012a). Four areas of inquiry that would have been particularly useful in the analysis and discussion were not fully explored as a result. Firstly, it is possible that the nature of the probing questions within the critical incident technique did not encourage full exploration of their agency and specific questions could have provided further enlightenment. Secondly the participants were not asked directly about the impact of their role as a manager. Thirdly, participants were not asked to consider how their thriving at work created outcomes that others may notice or would be of value to the organisation. Finally an exploration of how thriving may (or may not) be different to the related constructs of flourishing and wellbeing in the context of work would serve to further clarify the

context. Each of these areas is incorporated into the areas for further research identified in the next section.

It is also important to recognise that these particular limitations also created the opportunity for a contribution to current understandings of thriving at work. How individuals experience and describe it has not been a major determinant of the current conceptual frameworks, and this study suggests that more of this work is needed, rather than attempting to validate specific conceptual and theoretical models. It is tempting to suggest that further research is required to compare the behaviour of different groups such as managers and non-managers or to measure outcomes, but inherent in such an approach is the danger that it would require a different research paradigm, likely to be influenced by a positivist and quantitative approach, requiring measurement of a valid construct. Given the findings of this study, and if the pitfalls identified in the study of stress over many decades are to be avoided, it is hoped that such endeavours would be treated with caution until a deeper and broader understanding of how people experience thriving at work is explored (Briner & Fingret, 2000; Cohen et al., 1997).

7.2 Areas for Further Research and Implications for Practice

The experience of thriving at work appears to be a mechanism for building greater trust and confidence both for an individual and, possibly, for the organisation they work for. The upward spiral of significant organisational and individual resources this implies has the potential to make a real difference to the experience of work and warrants further verification and exploration of the theoretical model.

This section proposes a number of areas that would be suited to further research and organisational support.

7.2.1 More than the sum of its parts?

The first area that would benefit from further research is the exploration of the combined benefit of both psychological safety and meaningful work. The concept of an upward spiral suggests that there is a unique combination whereby an individual feels safe to experiment and take on new challenges, whilst finding their work to be meaningful, that leads to further opportunities for thriving. It is important to understand whether there is additional benefit when the two occur together that goes beyond the cumulative impact of them occurring separately.

Given the role of relationships with co-workers and the group of people that work for them captured in both strands of the helix, it seems likely that there may be a relationship between individual and team thriving that might create this additional impact. From a theoretical perspective, psychological safety is positioned as a set of beliefs shared by a team and, although meaningful work is more individually focused, this analysis suggests it is possible that shared values and meaning may create communal experiences of meaningful work. Only two studies have explored collective thriving as a distinct area of focus (Walumbwa et al., 2018; Xu & Wang, 2019). Walumbwa et al. (2018) found some support for a correlation to unit performance in a study of 275 Indonesian government workers from 94 work units, but the findings are limited in both causality and generalisability. However, participants did not often describe their co-workers as thriving in their descriptions of times they were themselves experiencing this, and the individual they chose to describe as thriving at work often stood out in some way that made them different

to those around them. The exception to this pattern of describing individuals rather than teams was participants' perspectives on the team they managed. In this context, participants did describe team thriving. Since the exact implications and extent of this are not clear, it would be useful to understand whether a manager can experience thriving independently of the team of co-workers they work with or the teams they manage, or whether those around them have to be thriving to allow this to happen.

7.2.2 Emphasis on individual differences.

Given the individual differences that appear to generate a unique set of circumstances to support each person's experience of thriving at work within the broad integrative themes, it is possible to imagine a process whereby an individual is able to self-assess why it matters to them, how they evaluate it and the factors that most influence it. This could lead to a person-oriented perspective, whereby the employee takes responsibility and is supported, in whatever ways they need, by their manager and colleagues. This requires a shift in emphasis that places the responsibility with the individual, whilst being less paternalistic. This is not to suggest that organisations bear no responsibility for the thriving of their employees, but rather that they are responsible for creating the conditions that enable the individual to thrive, responding and adapting to their changing needs over time. This area of research would be further supported by a greater understanding of the role of agency in thriving at work.

In this context, future research would focus on developing a comprehensive and person-oriented framework that enables individuals to define their version or *code* of thriving at work, whilst providing organisations with information on the

collective requirements of specific groups of employees. This framework would be informed by factors such as those identified within the integrative themes of this analysis, along with theories of psychological safety and meaningful work, which can guide an individual to a greater understanding of what it means for them. In this context a greater understanding of how thriving at work relates to concepts such as flourishing and wellbeing could also be explored. Creating this new paradigm could provide an opportunity for employers and employees to work together to increase each person's ability to thrive at work, creating benefits for all those involved.

7.2.3 Role of the line manager and the organisation in fostering thriving.

This study raises some questions that could have implications for understanding effective management in the context of thriving at work. Participants described the value they placed on “management by getting out of the way”; feeling trusted to make things happen and supported when things go wrong, rather than being coached by their line manager to minimise mistakes. The line manager could also have a role in creating a climate where a team can trust each other, share a common purpose, value competence and have a social and personal connection, thus supporting psychological safety and meaningful work. This shift in emphasis for managers of others has already been identified within the literature on psychological safety (Newman et al., 2017), and is worthy of further exploration in the context of thriving at work.

Organisations would play a significant role, however, in creating an environment where these conversations are facilitated, encouraged and respected, and where an individual is empowered to thrive at work. Processes within the organisation could support such conversations and opportunities for meaningful

work could be highlighted through line-management conversations, team discussions and organisational communications. Psychological safety could be reinforced by the reward, recognition, and performance processes. In particular, opportunities to build mutual trust can be amplified within existing processes, and the organisational narrative around risk, mistakes and learning could be designed to explicitly support psychological safety. Finally, an ethos of job crafting (Tims, Derks, & Bakker, 2016), whereby employees are able to “utilize opportunities to customize their jobs by actively changing their tasks and interactions with others at work” (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2008, p. 1) could be encouraged.

7.2.4 Process of evaluation.

The last theme identified within the analysis, and an integrative aspect of the DNA model, concerns the iterative and cumulative nature of the evaluation of this phenomenon. The suggestion that thriving at work is experienced as an upward spiral has been identified as being particularly worthy of further scholarship. If it is the case that small steps, which build on each other and have a strong emotional content, present a shared experience within a broader population, then it is a different way of conceptualising thriving at work, placing new emphasis on the process of evaluation. Selected participants described looking back on their day as part of their evaluation, while others described looking forward, anticipating what the day would hold, and many suggested they did both. Exploring this distinction could lead to a greater understanding of how thriving at work is both experienced and appraised. If it does vary by individual, which it does for this group, it would be interesting to understand what might correlate or even cause this distinction, as well as the implications for how work is organised, communicated and reviewed. As an

example, the participants in this study seemed to suggest that the morning is a time when most take a moment to look either back or forward. If this was an experience shared more generally, combined with the concept of an upward spiral, it could inform practical strategies to influence thriving at work.

This has not been an area of focus in the extant literature, and a greater understanding of this aspect is, therefore, needed. If regular, cumulative evaluation in the morning, and the individual nature of looking forward or back, were found to be a consistent phenomenon across a much broader population, this would warrant further focus in terms of practical implications for employers.

7.2.5 Recognition and reward of progress over achievement.

It is interesting to consider the role of progress along with the iterative and cumulative nature of the upward spiral in the context of a manager's role. In this position, individuals might be expected to have a longer-term, more strategic focus, on yearly business goals, for example. This analysis does not refute that this more strategic focus may contribute to the sense of making a difference, but the shorter term, incremental progress participants describe, provides a significant contribution to thriving at work.

Given the annual process of appraisal, reward, objectives and goals within most large organisations, a deeper understanding of how this approach supports (or potentially undermines) thriving at work, is of interest. It is possible to hypothesise that the achievement of big, important goals, that accumulate to deliver an organisation's plan is less relevant than a greater emphasis on small steps and progress in the context of work that matters to the individual. This is an area where experimentation within organisations would be worthwhile. Interestingly, many

organisations are attempting to move towards more agile and flexible planning processes in order to respond to a rapidly changing environment, and incentive schemes that reward these individual goals are being questioned (Chidiebere, Daniels, & Nielsen, 2017; Jaggars & Jones, 2018). This is one area where organisations will benefit from new approaches while supporting the thriving at work of individuals.

7.2.6 Is thriving at work the same for different types of work?

While the managers in this study came from very different organisations, there were a number of similarities in their experience of work. All participants described work that involved a number of complex and challenging inter-related tasks they were accountable for delivering over time. Participants also talked about goals that frequently shifted, new and unexpected work that changed their priorities, and the need to deliver within a web of interdependencies. The level of accountability and complexity involved leads to increased potential for risk, which may elucidate the emphasis on psychological safety. Similarly, longer-term projects that require a level of self-motivation and personal investment, may be more successful when individuals find their work meaningful. It cannot be assumed, however, that similar themes would emerge for those working in very different contexts. An individual working in a very creative role, for example, might experience thriving at work differently, as might an employee who spends the majority of their time on repetitive work with little discretionary decision making. This question was captured early in the interview process when the researcher wrote in their reflexive journal: “I wonder how this would be experienced by a hairdresser, working in a small shop, with two or three co-workers they know well, seeing different customers

all the time and doing something that is quite creative and matters to the customer – would they value different things?”.

7.3 Concluding Remarks

Overall, the experience of the managers in this study resonates with some aspects of the conceptualisations and theories that have been suggested in the extant literature more than others. In particular, the loose definition of “doing well and feeling good” is one that many participants volunteered, and they could define both in detail. This fits with the emphasis within some of the literature on happiness, flow, and well-being, and less with the ideas of developmental growth as an indicator of thriving at work.

The integrative themes identify the commonality of experience across the participants, suggesting an increased emphasis on building trust through empowerment, support and recognition, and enabling people to both identify and feel responsible for a contribution that matters in some way, is likely to increase thriving at work. These perspectives appear to be more appropriate to the theoretical positions of psychological safety and meaningful work than those deployed in the extant literature. This study also captures the importance of placing the individual at the centre of any conceptualisations. This can be justified by the emphasis on the direct relationships that participants in this study perceive to be so important – these relationships are with other people, not the entity or an abstract concept such as culture.

The helix, with characteristics similar to that of DNA, captures the personal nature of the experience of thriving at work, whilst supporting a continued attempt

to explore this concept from a qualitative perspective and offer “new and more nuanced ways of understanding traditional positive phenomena” (Maitlis, 2017, p. 319). The voices of this study suggest that thriving at work was important to the people who took part, led to outcomes that they perceived to be beneficial to themselves and their organisation, and appeared to be open to influence from both external factors and individual appraisal. This provides a strong justification for further exploration, and it is hoped their experience will provide a platform for further research, as well as the potential to better inform interventions in the workplace.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Long List of Papers for Literature Review and Reasons for Exclusion

Authors	Title	Include?	Thriving used to describe another concept	Not about the individual	Not about work	Focused on learning more about a particular group	Not available in English	Quality assessment	Notes
Abid, Zahra and Ahmed (2015)	Mediated mechanism of thriving at work between perceived organization support, innovative work behaviour and turnover Intention.	y							
Ainsworth and Oldfield (2019)	Quantifying teacher resilience: Context matters.	n	✓						Measuring wellbeing, burnout and job satisfaction as three independent variables.
Alexander and Moore (2008)	Introduction to African Americans: Benefits and challenges of working at predominantly white institutions: Strategies for thriving.	n	✓	✓		✓			Not about thriving but how a particular group succeed when faced with challenges and bias based on their ethnicity.
Anjum, Marri and Khan (2016)	Thriving at work: Evidences from telecom companies in Baluchistan.	y							
Arora and Bhagat (2016)	Well-being: Exploring its meaning at workplace.	n	✓						Broader concept of wellbeing in the context of the workplace.
Bakibinga, Vinje and Mittelmark (2012)	Self-tuning for job engagement: Ugandan nurses' self-care strategies in coping with work stress.	n	✓						Coping with difficult situations through self-care.
Bakker, van Veldhoven and Xanthopoulou (2010)	Beyond the demand-control model: Thriving on high job demands and resources.	n	✓						Concerned with task enjoyment and organisational commitment as outcomes of high challenge. Thrive only in the title.
Bensemmane, Ohana and Stinglhamber (2018)	Team justice and thriving: A dynamic approach.	y							
Boyd (2015)	Introducing thriving at work to the field of community psychology.	y							
Briedall (2011)	Palliative Care: A Place for Caregivers to Thrive.	n	✓						Caregiver stress, burnout, and self-care.
Brocksom (2018)	Juggling, but definitely thriving.	n			✓	✓			One person's life story that has led to success.
Carmeli and Spreitzer (2009)	Trust, connectivity, and thriving: Implications for innovative behaviors at work.	y							

Authors	Title	Include?	Thriving used to describe another concept	Not about the individual	Not about work	Focused on learning more about a particular group	Not available in English	Quality assessment	Notes
Carmeli and Russo (2016)	The power of micro-moves in cultivating regardful relationships: Implications for work-home enrichment and thriving.	y							
Chang-Hwanm Seung-Yoon and Inyong (2015)	The effect of team feedback environment on thriving at work and team commitment through feedback-seeking behavior.	n					✓		
Clapp and Town (2015)	Thriving at work through emotional intelligence.	n	✓						Discussion of the importance of EI in organisations.
Cohen (2005)	The new manager's guide to surviving (and thriving).	n	✓						Tips for being a new manager.
Conway and Foskey (2015)	Apprentices thriving at work: Looking through an appreciative lens.	y							
Cullen, Gerbasi and Chrobot-Mason (2018)	Thriving in central network positions: The role of political skill.	y							
Dagenais-Desmarais and Savoie (2012)	What is psychological well-being, really? A grassroots approach from the organizational sciences.	n	✓						Wellbeing, not thriving at work.
Dames (2019)	THRIVEable work environments: A study of interplaying factors that enable novice nurses to thrive.	n	✓						Looking at effective management of workplace stimuli in the first year of nursing training.
Davenport, Allisey, Page, LaMontagne and Reavley (2016)	How can organisations help employees thrive? The development of guidelines for promoting positive mental health at work.	n	✓		✓				Positive mental health and not just related to work.
Davenport (2017)	Thriving at work: How organizational culture affects workplace fulfilment.	n	✓	✓					Discussion of different organisational cultures and the impact on stress and fulfilment.
Deacon, Warne and McAndrew (2006)	Closeness, chaos and crisis: The attractions of working in acute mental health care.	n	✓						Aims to understand why acute mental health is an attractive role.
Dobrof, Bussey, and Muzina (2019)	Thriving in today's health care environment: Strategies for social work leadership in population health.	n	✓	✓					Focused on the clinical focus and organizational responsiveness of a healthcare provider.
Elias (2017)	Lessons learned from women in leadership positions: How working women can survive and thrive.	n	✓			✓			How a particular group succeed when faced with challenges and bias based on their gender.
Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman and Duckworth (2014)	Survivor mission: Do those who survive have a drive to thrive at work?	n	✓						Looking at impact on engagement of survivor mission.

Authors	Title	Include?	Thriving used to describe another concept	Not about the individual	Not about work	Focused on learning more about a particular group	Not available in English	Quality assessment	Notes
Fenwick et al. (2012)	Surviving, not thriving: A qualitative study of newly qualified midwives' experience of their transition to practice.	n	✓						Focused on successful transition from training to practice. Thriving only used in title.
Fogel (2017)	Amid the storm, surviving and thriving.	n			✓				Concerned with how communities responded to hurricanes, not just those working in this context.
Forbes (2018)	Thriving, not just surviving: Well-being in emergency medicine.	n	✓	✓					General discussion of wellbeing of physicians in emergency medicine. Organisational focus.
Forsyth (2006)	Your career: Surviving and thriving.	n	✓						Career development focus.
Frazier and Tupper (2018)	Supervisor prosocial motivation, employee thriving, and helping behavior: A trickle-down model of psychological safety.	y							
Gerbası, Porath, Parker, Spreitzer and Cross (2015)	Destructive de-energizing relationships: How thriving buffers their effect on performance.	y							
Gkorezis, Kalampouka and Petridou (2013)	The mediating role of belongingness in the relationship between workplace incivility and thriving.	y							
Gkorezis, Bellou and Petridou (2016)	Greek academics' intention to migrate during financial crisis: A moderated mediation model.	y							
Globerman, White, Mullings and Davies (2003)	Thriving in program management environments: The case of social work in hospitals.	n	✓						
(Graystone, 2019)Graystone (2019)	How to build a positive, multigenerational workforce.	n	✓	✓					Creating an environment where multiple generations of nurses can work together.
Griffin, (2007)	Wellness and thriving in a student registered nurse anaesthetist population.	n	✓						Thriving defined as academic achievement only.
Hakanen, Schaufeli and Ahola (2008)	The job demands-resources model: A three-year cross-lagged study of burnout, depression, commitment, and work engagement.	n	✓						Looking at Engagement, burnout, organisational commitment and depression.
Harker, Pidgeon, Klaassen and King (2016)	Exploring resilience and mindfulness as preventative factors for psychological distress burnout and secondary traumatic stress among human service professionals.	n	✓						Relationship between resilience, mindfulness, burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and psychological distress.

Authors	Title	Include?	Thriving used to describe another concept	Not about the individual	Not about work	Focused on learning more about a particular group	Not available in English	Quality assessment	Notes
Harris, Biddulph and Lang (2000)	Surviving and thriving: A small-scale study of the role of group work training in developing teachers' professional practice.	n	✓		✓				Interested in impact of specific training on their future development. Thriving only used in the title.
Hennekam (2017)	Thriving of older workers.	y							
Heekerens and Heinitz (2019)	Looking forward: The effect of the best-possible-self intervention on thriving through relative intrinsic goal pursuits.	n			✓				Not related to the workplace.
Hildenbrand, Sacramento and Binnewies (2018)	Transformational leadership and burnout: The role of thriving and followers' openness to experience.	y							
Hoff, Whitcomb and Nelson (2002)	Thriving and surviving in a new medical career: The case of hospitalist physicians.	n	✓						Career longevity as measured by burnout and intention to stay.
Houlihan (2008)	It's a world: How women can thrive in any industry.	n	✓	✓		✓			Not about thriving but how a particular group succeed when faced with challenges and bias based on their gender. Thriving is not defined or used as a concept in the article.
Hyvönen, Feldt, Salmela-Aro, Kinnunen and Mäkikangas (2007)	Young managers' drive to thrive: A personal work goal approach to burnout and work engagement.	n	✓						Examining workplace wellbeing as defined by high engagement and low burnout.
Jackson, Firtko and Edenborough (2007)	Personal resilience as a strategy for surviving and thriving in the face of workplace adversity: A literature review.	n	✓						Personal resilience as a strategy for responding to workplace adversity
Jaiswal and Dhar (2017)	The influence of servant leadership, trust in leader and thriving on employee creativity.	y							
Jiang (2017)	Proactive personality and career adaptability: The role of thriving at work.	y							
Jiang, Hu, Wang and Jiang (2019)	Knowledge hiding as a barrier to thriving: The mediating role of psychological safety and moderating role of organizational cynicism.	y							
Jiang, Jiang and Niesen (2019)	Workplace thriving in China.	y							
Jipeng, Kaiyuan, Xiangfei, Xiaofang and Ling (2019)	The effects of leader--member exchange, internal social capital, and thriving on job crafting.	y							

Authors	Title	Include?	Thriving used to describe another concept	Not about the individual	Not about work	Focused on learning more about a particular group	Not available in English	Quality assessment	Notes
Kabat-Farr and Cortina (2017)	Receipt of interpersonal citizenship: Fostering agentic emotion, cognition, and action in organizations.	y							
Kern, Waters, Adler and White (2014)	Assessing employee wellbeing in schools using a multifaceted approach: Associations with physical health, life satisfaction, and professional thriving.	n	✓						Organisational commitment and job satisfaction.
Kernan (2014)	Thriving full-time as a part-time associate.	n	✓		✓				General sense of thriving in life, linked to part-time or full-time work for war veterans.
Kim and Beehr (2019)	Thriving on demand: Challenging work results in employee flourishing through appraisals and resources.	n	✓						Studying flourishing beyond work.
Kira and Balkin (2014)	Interactions between work and identities: Thriving, withering, or redefining the self?	y							
Kira, Balkin and San (2012)	Authentic work and organizational change: Longitudinal evidence from a merger.	n	✓						The aims of the article were, first, to define and illustrate the concept of authentic work and, second, to outline the consequences that an organisational change may have on authentic work.
Kjeldmand, Holmström and Rosenqvist (2004)	Balint training makes GPs thrive better in their job.	n	✓						Work related satisfaction and improved doctor-patient relationships.
Kleine, Rudolph and Zacker (2019)	Thriving at work: A meta-analysis.	y							
KoÇAK and Agun (2019)	Explaining employee voice behavior through intragroup relationship quality and the role of thriving at work.	y							
Kowske, Lundby and Rasch (2009)	Turning 'survive' into 'thrive': Managing survivor engagement in a downsized organization.	n	✓						Focus on engagement and retention of employees who survive down-sizing.
Krasnow (2018)	10 Success-building habits to help You thrive (even in uncertain times).	n			✓				Doing well in life, including work, but not specific to work.
Kutsyruba, Walker, Stasel and Makhamreh (2019)	Developing resilience and promoting well-being in early career teaching: Advice from the Canadian beginning teachers.	n	✓						Interested in reducing turnover for new teachers by identifying strategies for resilience and wellbeing.
Lavine (2012)	Exploring the relationship between corporate social performance and work meaningfulness.	n	✓	✓					About how companies CSR agenda impacts on employees' wellbeing.
Leopold (2016)	How to help your senior employees thrive in the	n	✓						Keeping older employees healthy and engaged.

Authors	Title	Include?	Thriving used to describe another concept	Not about the individual	Not about work	Focused on learning more about a particular group	Not available in English	Quality assessment	Notes
	workplace.								
Li, Liu, Han and Zhang (2016)	Linking empowering leadership and change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior: The role of thriving at work and autonomy orientation.	y							
Ling, Hunter and Maple (2014)	Navigating the challenges of trauma counselling: How counsellors thrive and sustain their engagement.	y							
Lipsy (2009)	Urologic nurses thriving under pressure.	n	✓						Coping with pressure to deliver nursing care.
Liu and Bern-Klug (2013)	Nursing home social services directors who report thriving at work.	y							
Macoun and Miller (2014)	Surviving (thriving) in academia: Feminist support networks and women ECRs.	n	✓	✓					How a particular group succeed when faced with challenges and bias based on gender.
McInerney, Ganotice, King, Morin and Marsh (2015)	Teachers' commitment and psychological well-being: Implications of self-beliefs for teaching in Hong Kong.	n	✓						Perception of accomplishing a significant and interesting job allows one to fulfil oneself as an individual.
Mealer et al. (2012)	The presence of resilience is associated with a healthier psychological profile in intensive care unit (ICU) nurses: Results of a national survey.	n	✓						Resilience in the context of avoiding anxiety, depression and burnout.
Mohrman and Worley (2009)	Dealing with rough times: A capabilities development approach to surviving and thriving.	n		✓					Looking at organisational processes that make the organisation stronger.
Mortier, Vlerick and Clays (2016)	Authentic leadership and thriving among nurses: The mediating role of empathy.	y							
Mulki, Bardhhi, Lask and Nanavaty-Dahl (2009)	Set Up Remote Workers to Thrive.	n	✓						Strategies for organisations given challenges they face with employees working remotely.
Mushtaq, Abid, Sarwar and Ahmed (2017)	Forging ahead: How to thrive at the modern workplace.	y							
Niessen, Sonnentag and Sach (2012)	Thriving at work — a diary study.	y							
Niessen, Mäder, Stride and Jimmieson (2017)	Thriving when exhausted: The role of perceived transformational leadership.	y							
Norlander, Von Schedvin and Archer	Thriving as a function of affective personality: Relation to personality factors, coping strategies	n			✓				

Authors	Title	Include?	Thriving used to describe another concept	Not about the individual	Not about work	Focused on learning more about a particular group	Not available in English	Quality assessment	Notes
(2005)	and stress.								
Novaes, Ferreira and Gabardo-Martins (2017)	Características psicométricas da escala de prosperidade no trabalho [Psychometric characteristics of the Scale of Thriving at Work].	n					✓		
Oliver-Baxter, Brown and McIntyre (2017)	Surviving or thriving in the primary health care research workforce: The Australian experience.	n	✓						Role of career paths in job satisfaction and intention to stay. No direct link to thriving beyond title.
Page, Boysen, and Arya (2019)	Creating a Culture that Thrives: Fostering Respect, Trust, and Psychological Safety in the Workplace.	n		✓					Concerned with developing a culture that promotes psychological safety.
Paterson, Luthans and Jeung (2014)	Thriving at work: Impact of psychological capital and supervisor support.	y							
Perry, Brenner and Hofer (2015)	Thriving on challenge: Examining one teacher's view on sources of support for motivation and well-being.	n							Examining the role of motivation on teaching effectiveness.
Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson and Garnett (2012)	Thriving at work: Toward its measurement, construct validation, and theoretical refinement.	y							
Prem, Ohly, Kubicek and Korunka (2017)	Thriving on challenge stressors? Exploring time pressure and learning demands as antecedents of thriving at work.	y							
Prosser, Tuckey and Wendt (2013)	Affect and the lifeworld: Conceptualising surviving and thriving in the human service professions.	y							
Quinones, Rodríguez-Carvajal and Griffiths (2017)	Testing a eustress–distress emotion regulation model in British and Spanish front-line employees.	n	✓	✓					Thriving customer interactions.
Rawat and Nadavulakere (2015)	Examining the outcomes of having a calling: Does context matter?	n	✓						Interested in how those with a calling experience organisational commitment and lack of emotional exhaustion.
Raza, Ali, Ahmed and Moueed (2017)	Impact of managerial coaching on employee performance and organizational citizenship behavior: intervening role of thriving at work.	y							
Ren, Yunlu, Shaffer and Fodchuk (2015)	Expatriate success and thriving: The influence of job deprivation and emotional stability.	y							

Authors	Title	Include?	Thriving used to describe another concept	Not about the individual	Not about work	Focused on learning more about a particular group	Not available in English	Quality assessment	Notes
Riaz, Xu and Hussain (2018)	Understanding employee innovative behavior and thriving at work: A Chinese perspective.	y							
Royer and Moreau (2016)	A survey of Canadian early childhood educators' psychological wellbeing at work.	n	✓						Psychological wellbeing at work and perceptions of autonomy.
Russo, Buonocore, Carmeli and Guo (2018)	When family supportive supervisors meet employees' need for caring: Implications for work-family enrichment and thriving.	y							
Sarkar and Fletcher (2014)	Ordinary magic, extraordinary performance: Psychological resilience and thriving in high achievers.	y							
Sharma (2011)	An empirical investigation into the role of EQ/emotional intelligence competencies in mental well-being.	n	✓		✓				Looking at mental well-being more generally (not work).
Shinton (2006)	Politics in organisations: How to survive and thrive.	n	✓						Political awareness as a skill that helps people be successful in organisations.
Sim, Zanardelli, Loughran, Mannarino and Hill (2016)	Thriving, burnout, and coping strategies of early and later career counseling center psychologists in the United States.	y							
Sirén, Thorgren and Järnlström (2018)	Self-directed career management and mobility: The risk of lock-in effects from person-job fit.	n	✓						self-directed career management and effects on internal and external psychological career mobility.
Smith and Diedericks (2016)	Positive employment relations: A qualitative meta-synthesis of the evidence.	n		✓					Organisations thrive when they have good employee relations.
Sotile and Simonds, (2019)	The thriving neurosurgeon.	n	✓						Avoiding burnout.
Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein and Grant (2005)	A socially embedded model of thriving at work.	y							
Spreitzer, Porath and Gibson (2012)	Toward human sustainability: How to enable more thriving at work.	y							
Stockdale (2013)	How to thrive in change and uncertainty.	n	✓						Responses to change.
(Strecker, Huber, Höge, Hausler, & Höfer, 2019)Strecker, Huber, Höge, Hausler, and Höfer (2019)	Identifying thriving workplaces in hospitals: Work characteristics and the applicability of character strengths at work.	n	✓						Work engagement and general wellbeing

Authors	Title	Include?	Thriving used to describe another concept	Not about the individual	Not about work	Focused on learning more about a particular group	Not available in English	Quality assessment	Notes
Sumsion (2004)	Early childhood teachers' constructions of their resilience and thriving: A continuing investigation.	y							
Thibault-Landry, Egan, Crevier-Braud, Manganelli and Forest (2018)	An empirical investigation of the employee work passion appraisal model using self-determination theory.	n	✓						Focus of study is work passion and commitment (work intention).
Travis, Lee, Faulkner, Gerstenblatt and Boston (2014)	Cultivating a thriving childcare workforce: A theory-driven qualitative analysis.	y							
Tremblay and Messervey (2011)	The job demands-resources model: Further evidence for the buffering effect of personal resources.	n	✓						Compassion as a personal resource buffering the demands between job strain and job demands.
Tucker (2018)	A Persona-based formula for change: Using models of important accountant behaviors, companies can provide opportunities for their employees to thrive.	n	✓						How people respond to change - different archetypes.
Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte and Lens (2008)	Explaining the relationships between job characteristics, burnout, and engagement: The role of basic psychological need satisfaction.	n	✓						Relationship between theoretical constructs of need satisfaction, job exhaustion and vigour.
Vinje and Mittelmark (2007)	Job engagement's paradoxical role in nurse burnout.	n	✓						Avoidance of burn-out.
Vondracek, Ferreira and dos Santos (2010)	Vocational behavior and development in times of social change: New perspectives for theory and practice.	n	✓						Career development.
Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens and Smith (2016)	A multilevel model of employee innovation: Understanding the effects of regulatory focus, thriving, and employee involvement climate.	y							
Walton and Schlesinger (1979)	Do supervisors thrive in participative work systems?	n	✓						Employee productivity and quality of work life.
Walumbwa, Muchiri, Misati, Wu and Meiliani (2018)	Inspired to perform: A multilevel investigation of antecedents and consequences of thriving at work.	y							
Webber (1997)	Strategies for surviving and thriving in organizations.	n	✓						Suggestions of strategies to deal with uncertainty and technological changes in organisations.

Authors	Title	Include?	Thriving used to describe another concept	Not about the individual	Not about work	Focused on learning more about a particular group	Not available in English	Quality assessment	Notes
Welford (2005)	Survivor skills that can help HR managers survive and thrive.	n	✓			✓			Strategies to be successful in HR.
Wendt, Tuckey and Prosser (2011)	Thriving, not just surviving, in emotionally demanding fields of practice.	y							
Winkel, Honart, Robinson, Jones and Squires (2018)	Thriving in scrubs: A qualitative study of resident resilience.	n	✓						Grounded theory approach to a model of resilience in resident doctors.
Xu, Zhao, Li and Lin (2017)	Authentic leadership and employee creativity: Testing the multilevel mediation model.	y							
Xu, Loi and Chow (2019)	What threatens retail employees' thriving at work under leader-member exchange? The role of store spatial crowding and team negative affective tone.	y							
Xu and Wang (2019)	How and when servant leaders enable collective thriving: The role of team-member exchange and political climate.	y							
Yadav, Kohli and Yadav (2017)	Exploring the meaning of thriving at work through the hermeneutic analysis of Wings of Fire.	n						✓	
Yang, Lee, Liang and Zhang (2019)	Why and when paradoxical leader behavior impact employee creativity: Thriving at work and psychological safety.	y							
Zhang et al. (2018)	High-performance work system and employee performance: The mediating roles of social exchange and thriving and the moderating effect of employee proactive personality.	y							
Zhao et al. (2018)	Impact of workplace violence against nurses' thriving at work, job satisfaction and turnover intention: A cross-sectional study.	y							
Zhu, Law, Sun and Yang (2018)	Thriving of employees with disabilities: The roles of job self-efficacy, inclusion, and team-learning climate.	n				✓			

Appendix B: Characteristics of Papers in the Integrated Literature Review

Authors and year	Title	Theoretical perspective on thriving	Methodology	Sample size	Sample and setting	Findings extracted from empirical papers	Limitations identified by the authors
Abid, Zahra and Ahmed (2015)	Mediated mechanism of thriving at work between perceived organization support, innovative work behavior and turnover intention.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	147	Employees of a software house in Lahore.	Perceived organisational support was significantly and positively related to thriving at work. Thriving at work was positively associated with innovative work behaviour and negatively associated with turnover intention. Analysis supports thriving at work as a mediator of the relationship between perceived organisational support and innovative work behaviour. Doesn't support thriving at work as a mediator of the relationship between perceived organisational support and turnover intention.	Single organisation so cannot be generalised. Cross sectional (can't assume causality). Individual and therefore doesn't examine collective thriving at work. Supervisors' views on intention to stay may be biased. Small sample size.
Anjum, Marri and Khan (2016)	Thriving at work: Evidences from telecom companies in Balochistan.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	237	Employees from six telecommunication companies in Quetta City.	Thriving at work was negatively associated with incivility and turnover intentions. Results show that thriving significantly predicts incivility but thriving caused a relatively small proportion of variation in incivility. Thriving is a significant predictor of turnover intentions. It is concluded that thriving is a positive resource that combats negative attitudes and behaviours. It was found that male and female participants did not differ in terms of thriving nor on the basis of experience. However, thriving varied with age.	Limited generalisability due to sector and sample size.
Bensemmane, Ohana and Stinglhamber (2018)	Team justice and thriving: A dynamic approach.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	395	Masters Students in Business School, France.	Transient overall team justice is significantly associated with transient thriving at work. Transient self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between transient overall team justice and transient thriving at work.	None given.
Boyd (2015)	Introducing thriving at work to the field of community psychology.	Vitality and learning.	Theoretical discussion paper.				None given.
Carmeli and Russo (2016)	The power of micro-moves in cultivating regardful relationships: Implications for work-home enrichment and thriving.	Vitality and learning.	Theoretical discussion paper.				None given.
Carmeli and Spreitzer (2009)	Trust, connectivity, and thriving: Implications for innovative behaviours at work.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	172	Employees from multiple organisations in Israel.	Connectivity mediates the relationship between trust and thriving and thriving mediates the relationship between connectivity and innovative work behaviours.	Common method bias, due to structured survey and self-report. Doesn't address causality.

Authors and year	Title	Theoretical perspective on thriving	Methodology	Sample size	Sample and setting	Findings extracted from empirical papers	Limitations identified by the authors
Conway and Foskey (2015)	Apprentices thriving at work: Looking through an appreciative lens.	Vitality and learning.	Qualitative semi-structured interviews.	14	Apprentices in Australia.	Suggests relating at work and training and learning as causing thriving.	
Cullen, Gerbasi and Chrobot-Mason (2018)	Thriving in central network positions: The role of political skill.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	135	HR Division of Multinational corporation.	Individuals who experience role overload are less likely to thrive at work and role ambiguity has a negative and significant effect on thriving. Political skill does not moderate the work overload-workplace thriving relationship but mitigates the negative indirect effect of communication centrality on thriving through role ambiguity.	No claims of causality. Political skill measure not nuanced (short measure). Doesn't tell us if people influence and change their network.
Frazier and Tupper (2018)	Supervisor prosocial motivation, employee thriving, and helping behavior: A trickle-down model of psychological safety.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	245 employees, 83 supervisors	Variety of groups of 3 employees and a supervisor recruited via undergraduate students from USA.	Psychological safety was significantly related to employee thriving, which was then significantly related to helping behaviour and task performance. The indirect effects of psychological safety through thriving were significant for both helping and task performance.	Cross-sectional - no causality. Bias in supervisor ratings. Data collection techniques limited - snowballing.
Gerbasi, Porath, Parker, Spreitzer and Cross (2015)	Destructive de-energizing relationships: How thriving buffers their effect on performance.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	439	Management Consultants – international sample.	Those with higher levels of thriving were more likely to have higher levels of performance. Thriving moderated the effect of the number of de-energizing relationships on failing to meet performance expectations compared with meeting or exceeding expectations.	Did not describe frequency or nature of de-energizing relationships or consider other buffers such as resilience or social capital. Effect sizes small.
Gkorezis, Kalampouka and Petridou (2013)	The mediating role of belongingness in the relationship between workplace incivility and thriving.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	163	Employees in two private banks in Greece.	Workplace incivility negatively related to thriving at work and there was significant relationship between belongingness and thriving and a mediating role between workplace incivility and thriving.	Cannot infer causality. Self-report and single source - common method bias. Confined to single sector.
Gkorezis, Bellou and Petridou (2016)	Greek academics' intention to migrate during financial crisis: A moderated mediation model.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	273	Academics from a Greek University.	Work overload was negatively associated with thriving and thriving affected intention to leave. Results suggest there is an indirect effect of work overload on intention to leave via thriving. Organisational tenure moderates the relationship between work overload and intention to leave through the mediating role of thriving.	Single source, self-reported and not generalisable.

Authors and year	Title	Theoretical perspective on thriving	Methodology	Sample size	Sample and setting	Findings extracted from empirical papers	Limitations identified by the authors
Hennekam (2017)	Thriving of older workers.	Vitality and learning.	Mixed methods, quantitative cross-sectional and qualitative semi-structured interviews.	920 surveys, 13 interviews	Older unemployed workers (50 or above) in the Netherlands.	Suggests a positive relationship between thriving and self-perceived employability. Neuroticism was negatively related to thriving, extraversion and conscientiousness were positively related to thriving. No significant relationships for agreeableness and openness. Interviews suggested that the experience of thriving changed as they settled in to work - more focused on vitality than learning to begin with. Contextual factors such as climate of trust and respect, decision making authority and information sharing also mentioned.	Selection bias and not generalisable.
Hildenbrand, Sacramento and Binnewies (2018)	Transformational leadership and burnout: The role of thriving and followers' openness to experience.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	148	Employees in a manufacturing site in Germany	Transformational leadership at Time 1 was negatively related to burnout at Time 2 and that this effect was mediated by employees' thriving at work. These relationships were moderated by employees' OTE in such a way that only employees with medium and high level of OTE showed increased thriving and consequently reduced burnout under transformational supervision, while this effect did not hold for employees low on OTE.	High correlation between thriving and burnout. Not longitudinal. Self-report.
Jaiswal and Dhar (2017)	The influence of servant leadership, trust in leader and thriving on employee creativity.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	48 teams, 567 team members	26 organisations in India.	Thriving had a significant moderating effect on the relationship between trust in leader and employee creativity. The results showed that when thriving is less, trust in leader has less impact on employee creativity and when thriving at work is high, the relationship is strengthened.	Cross sectional. Did not consider servant leadership as an antecedent of thriving at work.
Jiang (2017)	Proactive personality and career adaptability: The role of thriving at work.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	364	Adult workers in China.	Thriving at work partially mediated the relationship between proactive personality and career adaptability. The relationship between thriving and career adaptability is stronger when proactive personality is low rather than high.	Cross sectional - cannot assume causality. Common method bias.
Jiang, Hu, Wang, and Jiang (2019)	Knowledge hiding as a barrier to thriving: The mediating role of psychological safety and moderating role of organizational cynicism.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional and time-lagged surveys.	214 392 205	Adult workers in China (214 and 205). Panel of adult workers from Europe and USA (392).	Knowledge hiding negatively had an indirect effect on thriving at work via psychological safety.	Causality cannot be assumed. Could be alternative explanations for relationship between knowledge hiding and psychological safety.

Authors and year	Title	Theoretical perspective on thriving	Methodology	Sample size	Sample and setting	Findings extracted from empirical papers	Limitations identified by the authors
Jiang, Jiang, and Nielsen (2019)	Workplace thriving in China.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional (205) and time-lagged (31) surveys.	285 31	Adult workers in China from a participant pool (285). Adult workers recruited by professional network in China (31).	Confirmed that in the Chinese setting, workplace thriving is a higher order construct represented by both a sense of learning and a sense of vitality and developed a culturally sensitive scale (WTS). Found that learning goal orientation and exploration at work fostered thriving, while role ambiguity reduced thriving. Also, exploration mediated the relationship between learning goal orientation and thriving. WTS was found to be reliable over time in the Chinese setting.	
Jipeng, Kaiyuan, Xiangfei, Xiaofang, and Ling (2019)	The effects of leader-member exchange, internal social capital, and thriving on job crafting.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	212	Adult workers in China.	Leader:member exchange is an important antecedent of job crafting, and that internal social capital moderated the relationship between LMX and job crafting among our participants. We also found that LMX, internal social capital, and thriving were jointly related to job crafting.	Limitations of self-report although tested for common method bias.
Kabat-Farr and Cortina (2017)	Receipt of interpersonal citizenship: Fostering agentic emotion, cognition, and action in organizations.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	479 workers, 160 co-workers	Working adults in the US.	Feelings of self-assurance linked to thriving on the job. Thriving was a significant predictor of both forms of Organisational Citizenship Behaviours, directed toward the organisation and toward individuals.	Causality cannot be assumed. Common method bias.
Kira and Balkin (2014)	Interactions between work and identities: Thriving, withering, or redefining the self?	Vitality and learning.	Theoretical discussion paper.				
Kleine, Rudolph, and Zacher (2019)	Thriving at work: A meta-analysis.	Vitality and learning.	Meta-analysis.	73 studies.	Quantitative studies of thriving at work defined as vitality and learning.	Results showed that thriving at work is associated with individual characteristics, such as psychological capital, proactive personality, positive affect, and work engagement. Positive associations were also found between thriving at work and relational characteristics, including supportive co-worker behavior, supportive leadership behaviour, and perceived organizational support. Moreover, thriving at work is related to important employee outcomes, including health-related outcomes like burnout, attitudinal outcomes like commitment, and performance-related outcomes like task performance. The results of relative weights analyses suggest that thriving exhibits small, albeit incremental predictive validity above and beyond positive affect and work engagement, for task performance, job satisfaction, subjective health, and burnout. Overall, the findings of this meta-analysis support Spreitzer and colleagues' (2005) model and underscore the importance of thriving in the work context.	Only able to include variables that have been considered in past empirical research. Most studies cross-sectional and self-report which could lead to common method bias. Future studies should include more objective measures. Cannot draw conclusions about meta-analytic data. Cannot draw conclusions about the role of the dimensions of thriving and vitality. Future research should focus on operationalizing. Examine at different conceptual and

Authors and year	Title	Theoretical perspective on thriving	Methodology	Sample size	Sample and setting	Findings extracted from empirical papers	Limitations identified by the authors
							analytic levels: individual, team and organisational.
KoÇAk and Agun (2019)	Explaining employee voice behavior through intragroup relationship quality and the role of thriving at work.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	462	Workers from diverse industries in Turkey.	Thriving at work mediates the relationship between high quality relationships and employee voice behaviour. There is a significant indirect effect suggesting full moderation.	
Li, Liu, Han and Zhang (2016)	Linking empowering leadership and change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior: The role of thriving at work and autonomy orientation.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	203 employees, 80 supervisors	IT Company in China.	Found a significant indirect effect of empowering leadership on change-oriented OCBs through thriving at work. The study also found that, for employees with high autonomy orientation, the positive effect stimulated by empowering leadership was more distinct.	Cross-sectional so cannot claim causality. Single organisation - need to understand cultural differences
Ling, Hunter and Maple (2014)	Navigating the challenges of trauma counselling: How counsellors thrive and sustain their engagement.	Vitality and learning.	Qualitative semi-structured interviews.	18	Therapists in Australia.	Challenges provided opportunity to engage in meaningful, valued and rewarding work. They were able to utilise a range of resources (such as supervision, peer support, managing case load, professional development, varying work activities, own self-care strategies) that allowed them to manage the stressors successfully and thrive in the work	Bias of participants, cross sectional, limited generalisability.
Liu and Bern-Klug (2013)	Nursing home social services directors who report thriving at work.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	927	Full time nursing Home Social Services Directors, US.	Job autonomy and being treated like an important part of the team each had a unique contribution in increasing thriving. Three variables that decreased job thriving include not having enough time to identify and meet residents' psychosocial needs, having to do things that others could do, and not clear what the social service role is. The variable with the highest unique contribution to explaining thriving is "having enough time to identify and meet the social and emotional needs of residents," followed in importance by "being treated as an important part of the team by one's boss."	One variable to measure thriving. Cross-sectional.

Authors and year	Title	Theoretical perspective on thriving	Methodology	Sample size	Sample and setting	Findings extracted from empirical papers	Limitations identified by the authors
Mortier, Vlerick and Clays (2016)	Authentic leadership and thriving among nurses: The mediating role of empathy.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	360	Nurses in a hospital in Belgium.	Positive association between perceived authentic leadership and both thriving indicators (vitality and learning). The results showed full mediation of nurse managers' empathy in the relationship between authentic leadership and vitality. However, a positive association between authentic leadership and learning was not explained by empathy of the leader.	Didn't take into account individual characteristics that might moderate other relationships or cultural factors. No causality can be inferred. Self-report.
Mushtaq, Abid, Sarwar and Ahmed (2017)	Forging ahead: How to thrive at the modern workplace.	Vitality and learning	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	221	Diverse occupations in Lahore, Pakistan.	Proactive personality, civility, fairness perception, organizational support, and supervisor support that together act as antecedents of thriving at the workplace.	Service sector only - may be different in manufacturing. Can't claim causality and self-report introduces same-source bias. Homogenous sample so cannot be generalised beyond Lahore, or Pakistan.
Niessen, Sonnentag and Sach (2012)	Thriving at work — a diary study.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	121	Social Service Workers across different offices in the US.	Learning varies day by day. Participants are more likely to report positive meaning at work in the morning and that they have acquired relevant knowledge at midday. They are more likely to report vitality and a higher sense of learning at the end of the day. Relationship between task focus and exploration and thriving, but not so much heedful relating (may be because measured on a daily basis).	Limited generalisability. Some of the measures for resources and task were limited. Captured lagged relationships over 2 or 3 hours but not more short-term associations.
Niessen, Mäder, Stride and Jimmieson (2017)	Thriving when exhausted: The role of perceived transformational leadership.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	200	High School teachers in West Germany.	No direct relationship between transformational leadership style and thriving at work but relationship was moderated by emotional exhaustion. If exhaustion high then decreased thriving, if low increased.	Self-report. Two wave design means can't conclude there is a true change, would need a third point in time and the mediator and outcome should be assessed at different points. It is possible that observations are non-dependent.

Authors and year	Title	Theoretical perspective on thriving	Methodology	Sample size	Sample and setting	Findings extracted from empirical papers	Limitations identified by the authors
Paterson, Luthans and Jeung (2014)	Thriving at work: Impact of psychological capital and supervisor support.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	198	Employee supervisor dyads of working adults in the US.	Support for role of individual in thriving at work - psychological capital and contextual factor of supervisory support climate. Supports relationship between task focus and thriving and the same for heedful relating. Relationship between PsycCap and thriving was mediated via task focus but not via heedful relating. Also suggests thriving at work is related to job performance and self-development.	Weren't able to test exploration as one of the agentic behaviours or the feedback loops in the conceptual model. Time-lagged but causality cannot be assumed.
Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson and Garnett (2012)	Thriving at work: Toward its measurement, construct validation, and theoretical refinement.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	175 410 316 335	Undergraduates (175). MBA students (410). University employees and supervisors (316). Employees of 6 diverse organisations (335). MBA students (as above). All US.	Support for the two-dimensional conceptualisation of thriving. Thriving contributes to reduced burnout and improved perceptions of health. Links adaptive behaviours of career development initiative and job performance. Suggests thriving at work is distinct to thriving at home and changes over time.	Cannot claim causality.
Prem, Ohly, Kubicek and Korunka (2017)	Thriving on challenge stressors? Exploring time pressure and learning demands as antecedents of thriving at work.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	124	Knowledge Workers. 376 days of data.	Challenge stressors of time pressure and learning demands had positive effect on learning at work. No significant effect on vitality (positive or negative). Challenge appraisal played a role in the indirect effect of challenge stressors on learning, but not vitality. Hindrance appraisal played a role in the indirect effect of learning demands on vitality (negative).	Self-report - common method bias. Abbreviation of the scales reduced internal consistency. Only focused on two challenge stressors. Results not generalisable beyond knowledge workers.
Prosser, Tuckey and Wendt (2013)	Affect and the lifeworld: Conceptualising surviving and thriving in the human service professions.	None given.	Theoretical discussion paper.				
Raza, Ali, Ahmed and Moueed (2017)	Impact of managerial coaching on employee performance and organizational citizenship behavior: intervening role of thriving at work.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	280	Pharmaceutical Sector, Pakistan.	Thriving at work partially mediates the impact of managerial coaching on job performance. Managerial coaching has an indirect impact on OCB-individual and OCB-organisation through thriving at work - full mediation.	Generalisability. Cross-sectional, cannot claim causality. Mainly male sample.

Authors and year	Title	Theoretical perspective on thriving	Methodology	Sample size	Sample and setting	Findings extracted from empirical papers	Limitations identified by the authors
Ren, Yunlu, Shaffer and Fodchuk (2015)	Expatriate success and thriving: The influence of job deprivation and emotional stability.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	121	International Teachers working in the US.	Perceptions of job deprivation with respect to cultural instruction competence were negatively related to expatriate thriving. Perceptions of job deprivation with respect to autonomy and relatedness were more negatively associated with expatriate thriving when emotional stability was low. Thriving was positively related to expatriate engagement and retention beyond adjustment.	Although longitudinal main variables all collected at the same time with a single source - common method variance. Cannot be confident about the predictive relationships or causality. Expat teachers limits generalisability.
Riaz, Xu and Hussain (2018)	Understanding employee innovative behavior and thriving at work: A Chinese perspective.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	402	Chinese R&D workers across five organisations in China.	Organisation support for innovation mediated the relationship between employee thriving at work and innovative behaviour. External work contacts positively moderated the indirect effect of thriving at work on employee innovative behaviour via organisational support such that the indirect effect was more significant when employees had more external social exchanges.	Time lagged but not longitudinal. Generalisability to western cultures.
Russo, Buonocore, Carmeli and Guo (2018)	When family supportive supervisors meet employees' need for caring: Implications for work-family enrichment and thriving.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	156 356	Managers in Italy (156). Workers in 3 cities in China (356).	Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviour promotes greater thriving for employees and is stronger for those employees who have a high need for caring	Reduced common method variance because of time lag but causal relationships cannot be assumed. Different measures are needed to avoid mono-method bias. Examines work-to-family enrichment, not the other way around and doesn't consider other variables than FSSB or the individual factors that might make a difference.
Sarkar and Fletcher (2014)	Ordinary magic, extraordinary performance: Psychological resilience and thriving in high achievers.	Vitality and learning.	Qualitative semi-structured interviews.	13	High achievers from the UK from 11 performance domains.	Identified 6 themes: positive and proactive personality, experience and learning, sense of control, flexibility and adaptability, balance and perspective, perceived social support.	
Sim, Zanardelli, Loughran, Mannarino and Hill (2016)	Thriving, burnout, and coping strategies of early and later career counseling center psychologists in the United States.	Vitality and learning.	Qualitative semi-structured interviews.	14	University Counsellors, USA.	Identified 5 factors: Recognition for achievement, climate of the counselling centre, involvement with training/mentoring, client improvement and appreciation, involvement with national associations. Didn't identify any factors that suggested burnout was the opposite of thriving - seemed to relate to specific challenges faced in the workplace.	Can't generalise the findings. May have been a social desirability factor when discussing issues such as burnout. Participants known to researchers and researchers all of similar background.

Authors and year	Title	Theoretical perspective on thriving	Methodology	Sample size	Sample and setting	Findings extracted from empirical papers	Limitations identified by the authors
Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein and Grant (2005)	A socially embedded model of thriving at work.	None given.	Theoretical discussion paper.				
Spreitzer, Porath and Gibson (2012)	Toward human sustainability: How to enable more thriving at work.	Vitality and learning.	Theoretical discussion paper.				
Sumsion (2004)	Early childhood teachers' constructions of their resilience and thriving.	Growth as a response to trauma.	Qualitative semi-structured interviews.	7	Educators in Australia.	Identified 8 factors: self-insight, commitment to ongoing learning, philosophical stance or moral purpose, engagement in conscious career decision making, employer support, perceived professional freedom and agency, collegiality, recognition by others of expertise.	
Travis, Lee, Faulkner, Gerstenblatt and Boston (2014)	Cultivating a thriving childcare workforce: A theory-driven qualitative analysis.	Vitality and learning.	Qualitative focus groups.	26	3 focus groups of Childcare workers in the US.	Identified 4 themes: Decision making discretion, trust and respect and meaning to develop intrinsic motivation and foster team orientation. Developed conceptual model based on affirming work conditions, cultivated job resources and worker engagement.	
Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens and Smith (2016)	A multilevel model of employee innovation: Understanding the effects of regulatory focus, thriving, and employee involvement climate.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	346	Maintenance employees in 2 US organisations and 75 distinct work teams.	Promotion focus and employee involvement climate interacted to enhance innovation via thriving. Suggests that individuals possessing a high promotion focus ad embedded in organisational contexts with high levels of employee involvement are more likely to thrive at work and, subsequently exhibit higher levels of innovation.	Findings may not generalise to more managerial, cognitively laden jobs. Predictive but not truly longitudinal.
Walumbwa, Muchiri, Misati, Wu and Meiliani (2018)	Inspired to perform: A multilevel investigation of antecedents and consequences of thriving at work.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	275	Employees in 94 work units in regional government in Indonesia.	Servant leadership and core-self evaluations positively relate to thriving at work and thriving at work positively relates to positive health at the individual level, with this relationship partially mediated by affective commitment. Collective thriving at work positively relates to collective affective commitment, which in turn positively relates to overall unit performance.	Cannot claim causality.
Wendt, Tuckey and Prosser (2011)	Thriving, not just surviving, in emotionally demanding fields of	None given.	Qualitative semi-structured	11	Teachers and social workers in Australia.	Identified 5 factors: Challenge, confidence, making a difference, bigger cause and having and being a role model.	

Authors and year	Title	Theoretical perspective on thriving	Methodology	Sample size	Sample and setting	Findings extracted from empirical papers	Limitations identified by the authors
	practice.		interviews.				
Xu, Zhao, Li and Lin (2017)	Authentic leadership and employee creativity: Testing the multilevel mediation model.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	428	Engineers in Taiwan in 63 teams.	Leader:member exchange and team psychological safe climate mediated the positive relationship of authentic leadership on followers thriving at work. Indirect relationship between this exchange and creativity through thriving at work was stronger when authentic leadership was present.	Issues with common method. Cross-sectional. Does not consider other potential mechanisms.
Xu, Loi and Chow (2019)	What threatens retail employees' thriving at work under leader-member exchange? The role of store spatial crowding and team negative affective tone.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	614 211	Retail employees (614) and store managers (211) across 89 grocery stores in China.	The results confirm high-quality LMX relationships enable employees to sense forward progress and feel energetic at work. Store spatial crowding restricts the positive impact of LMX on their thriving. In addition, team negative affective tone plays a partial mediating role in transmitting the cross-level moderating effect of store spatial crowding to the LMX–thriving relationship.	Limited generalisability beyond retail employees in China. Cannot rule out common method bias.
Xu and Wang (2019)	How and when servant leaders enable collective thriving: The role of team–member exchange and political climate.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	80 teams of 520 employees.	Manufacturing organisation in China.	A highly political climate is a dual-stage moderator hindering the positive impact of servant leadership on collective thriving.	Limited generalisability beyond manufacturing employees in China. Cannot rule out common method bias. Cannot claim causality. Future research should broaden the understanding of what produces thriving teams and how and when this occurs.
Yang, Li, Liang, and Zhang, (2019)	Why and when paradoxical leader behavior impact employee creativity: Thriving at work and psychological safety.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys.	139 supervisor-employee dyads.	Workers from four Chinese enterprises.	Paradoxical leader behaviour has positive effects on employee creativity via the mediating effect of thriving at work. The results also show that psychological safety strengthens the positive relationship between thriving at work and employee creativity. This positive relationship will be stronger when there are higher levels of psychological safety.	Reverse causality cannot be ruled out. Longitudinal study is needed. Generalisability is limited and there may be unmeasured variables that are influencing the relationships.
Zhang et al. (2018)	High-performance work system and employee performance: The mediating roles of social exchange and thriving and the moderating effect of employee proactive personality.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	463	391 employees and 74 supervisors from 21 firms in China.	Social exchange and thriving mediated the effects of HPWS on employee task performance and OCT. Proactive personality attenuated HPWS's direct effect on thriving.	

Authors and year	Title	Theoretical perspective on thriving	Methodology	Sample size	Sample and setting	Findings extracted from empirical papers	Limitations identified by the authors
Zhao et al. (2018)	Impact of workplace violence against nurses' thriving at work, job satisfaction and turnover intention: A cross-sectional study.	Vitality and learning.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.	1024	Nurses in 26 cities in China.	Workplace violence significantly negatively influenced thriving at work. Job satisfaction predicted thriving at work.	Snowball sampling so not representative. Response bias due to self-report. Cross-section precludes ability to determine causal direction.

Appendix C: Assessment of the Quality of the Literature

For ease of presentation the one mixed methods study is presented separately and the questions that are not pertinent to the methodologies of the studies being assessed have been excluded.

Authors and Year	Title	Methodological Approach	1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?	4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?	4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?
Abid, Zahra and Ahmed (2015)	Mediated mechanism of thriving at work between perceived organization support, innovative work behaviour and turnover Intention.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	X	✓	?	X
Anjum, Marri and Khan (2016)	Thriving at work: Evidences from telecom companies in Balochistan.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bensemmane, Ohana and Stinglhamber (2018)	Team justice and thriving: A dynamic approach.	Quantitative time-lagged study						X	X	✓	?	✓
Carmeli and Spreitzer (2009)	Trust, connectivity, and thriving: Implications for innovative behaviours at work.	Quantitative time-lagged study						✓	✓	✓	?	✓
Conway and Foskey (2015)	Apprentices thriving at work: Looking through an appreciative lens.	Qualitative semi-structured interviews	✓	✓	?	?	?					
Cullen, Gerbasi and Chrobot-Mason (2018)	Thriving in central network positions: The role of political skill.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Frazier and Tupper (2018)	Supervisor prosocial motivation, employee thriving, and helping	Quantitative time-lagged study						X	X	✓	?	✓

Authors and Year	Title	Methodological Approach	1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?	4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?	4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?
	behaviour: A trickle-down model of psychological safety.											
Gerbasi, Porath, Parker, Spreitzer and Cross (2015)	Destructive de-energizing relationships: How thriving buffers their effect on performance.	Quantitative time-lagged study						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gkorezis, Kalamouka and Petridou (2013)	The mediating role of belongingness in the relationship between workplace incivility and thriving.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	✓	✓	?	✓
Gkorezis, Bellou and Petridou (2016)	Greek academics' intention to migrate during financial crisis: A moderated mediation model.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	✓	✓	?	✓
Hildenbrand, Sacramento and Binnewies (2018)	Transformational leadership and burnout: The role of thriving and followers' openness to experience.	Quantitative time-lagged study						✓	✓	✓	?	✓
Jaiswal and Dhar (2017)	The influence of servant leadership, trust in leader and thriving on employee creativity.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jiang (2017)	Proactive personality and career adaptability: The role of thriving at work.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jiang, Hu, Wang and Jiang (2019)	Knowledge hiding as a barrier to thriving: The mediating role of psychological safety and moderating role of	Quantitative cross-sectional and time-lagged surveys						✓	?	✓	?	✓

Authors and Year	Title	Methodological Approach	1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?	4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?	4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?
	organizational cynicism.											
Jiang, Jiang and Niesen (2019)	Workplace thriving in China.	Quantitative cross-sectional and time-lagged surveys.						✓	?	✓	?	✓
Jipeng, Kaiyuan, Xiangfei, Xiaofang and Ling (2019)	The effects of leader-member exchange, internal social capital, and thriving on job crafting.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.						✓	?	✓	?	✓
Kabat-Farr and Cortina (2017)	Receipt of interpersonal citizenship: Fostering agentic emotion, cognition, and action in organizations.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	✓	✓	?	✓
KoÇAk and Agun (2019)	Explaining employee voice behavior through intragroup relationship quality and the role of thriving at work.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys.						✓	?	✓	?	✓
Li, Liu, Han and Zhang (2016)	Linking empowering leadership and change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior: The role of thriving at work and autonomy orientation.	Quantitative time-lagged study						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ling, Hunter and Maple (2014)	Navigating the challenges of trauma counselling: How counsellors thrive and sustain their engagement.	Qualitative semi-structured interviews	X	✓	✓	✓						

Authors and Year	Title	Methodological Approach	1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?	4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?	4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?
Liu and Bern-Klug (2013)	Nursing home social services directors who report thriving at work.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	✓	X	?	✓
Mortier, Vlerick and Clays (2016)	Authentic leadership and thriving among nurses: The mediating role of empathy.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	✓	✓	?	✓
Mushtaq, Abid, Sarwar and Ahmed (2017)	Forging ahead: How to thrive at the modern workplace.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	✓	?	?	✓
Niessen, Sonnentag and Sach (2012)	Thriving at work - a diary study.	Quantitative time-lagged study						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Niessen, Mäder, Stride and Jimmieson (2017)	Thriving when exhausted: The role of perceived transformational leadership.	Quantitative time-lagged study						✓	?	✓	?	✓
Paterson, Luthans and Jeung (2014)	Thriving at work: Impact of psychological capital and supervisor support.	Quantitative time-lagged study						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson and Garnett (2012)	Thriving at work: Toward its measurement, construct validation, and theoretical refinement.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Prem, Ohly, Kubicek and Korunka (2017)	Thriving on challenge stressors? Exploring time pressure and learning demands as antecedents of thriving at work.	Quantitative time-lagged study						✓	✓	?	?	✓
Raza, Ali, Ahmed and Moueed (2017)	Impact of managerial coaching on employee performance and	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Authors and Year	Title	Methodological Approach	1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?	4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?	4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?
	organizational citizenship behavior: intervening role of thriving at work.											
Ren, Yunlu, Shaffer and Fodchuk (2015)	Expatriate success and thriving: The influence of job deprivation and emotional stability.	Quantitative time-lagged study						✓	✓	✓	?	✓
Riaz, Xu and Hussain (2018)	Understanding employee innovative behaviour and thriving at work: A Chinese perspective.	Quantitative time-lagged study						✓	?	✓	?	✓
Russo, Buonocore, Carmeli and Guo (2018)	When family supportive supervisors meet employees' need for caring: Implications for work–family enrichment and thriving.	Quantitative time-lagged study						X	X	✓	?	✓
Sarkar and Fletcher (2014)	Ordinary magic, extraordinary performance: Psychological resilience and thriving in high achievers.	Qualitative semi-structured interviews	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Sim, Zanardelli, Loughran, Mannarino and Hill (2016)	Thriving, burnout, and coping strategies of early and later career counselling center psychologists in the United States.	Qualitative semi-structured interviews	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Sumsion (2004)	Early childhood teachers' constructions of their resilience and	Qualitative semi-structured interviews	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					

Authors and Year	Title	Methodological Approach	1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?	4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?	4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?
	thriving: A continuing investigation.											
Travis, Lee, Faulkner, Gerstenblatt and Boston (2014)	Cultivating a thriving childcare workforce: A theory-driven qualitative analysis.	Qualitative focus groups	?	✓	?	✓	✓					
Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens and Smith (2016)	A multilevel model of employee innovation: Understanding the effects of regulatory focus, thriving, and employee involvement climate.	Quantitative time-lagged study						✓	?	✓	?	✓
Walumbwa, Muchiri, Misati, Wu and Meiliani (2018)	Inspired to perform: A multilevel investigation of antecedents and consequences of thriving at work.	Quantitative time-lagged study						✓	?	✓	?	✓
Wendt, Tuckey and Prosser (2011)	Thriving, not just surviving, in emotionally demanding fields of practice.	Qualitative semi-structured interviews	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Xu, Zhao, Li and Lin (2017)	Authentic leadership and employee creativity: Testing the multilevel mediation model.	Quantitative time-lagged study						✓	?	✓	?	✓
Xu, Loi and Chow (2019)	What threatens retail employees' thriving at work under leader-member exchange? The role of store spatial crowding and team negative affective tone.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys						✓	?	✓	?	✓

Authors and Year	Title	Methodological Approach	1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?	4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?	4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?
Xu and Wang (2019)	How and when servant leaders enable collective thriving: The role of team–member exchange and political climate.	Quantitative time-lagged surveys						✓	?	✓	?	✓
Yadav, Kohli and Yadav (2017)	Exploring the meaning of thriving at work through the hermeneutic analysis of Wings of Fire.	Qualitative hermeneutics	x	x	x	x	x					
Yang, Lee, Liang and Zhang (2019)	Why and when paradoxical leader behavior impact employee creativity: Thriving at work and psychological safety.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys						✓	?	✓	?	✓
Zhang, Bal, Akhtar, Long, Zhang and Ma (2018)	High-performance work system and employee performance: The mediating roles of social exchange and thriving and the moderating effect of employee proactive personality.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Zhao et al. (2018)	Impact of workplace violence against nurses' thriving at work, job satisfaction and turnover intention: A cross-sectional study.	Quantitative cross-sectional study						x	x	✓	?	✓

Authors	Title	Methodological Approach	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	5.1 Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?	5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?	5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?	5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?	5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?
Hennekam (2017)	Thriving of older workers.	Mixed methods, quantitative cross-sectional and qualitative semi-structured interviews											X	X	X	X	✓

Appendix D: Papers Cited in Analysis of Findings by Theme

Theme	Authors and year	Title
The supervisor creates the environment for thriving at work	Abid, Zahra and Ahmed (2015)	Mediated mechanism of thriving at work between perceived organization support, innovative work behavior and turnover intention.
	Hildenbrand, Sacramento and Binnewies (2018)	Transformational leadership and burnout: The role of thriving and followers' openness to experience.
	Jaiswal and Dhar (2017)	The influence of servant leadership, trust in leader and thriving on employee creativity.
	Jipeng, Kaiyuan, Xiangfei, Xiaofang, and Ling (2019)	The effects of leader--member exchange, internal social capital, and thriving on job crafting.
	KoÇAk and Agun (2019)	Explaining employee voice behavior through intragroup relationship quality and the role of thriving at work.
	Li, Liu, Han and Zhang (2016)	Linking empowering leadership and change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior: The role of thriving at work and autonomy orientation.
	Liu and Bern-Klug (2013)	Nursing home social services directors who report thriving at work.
	Mortier, Vlerick and Clays (2016)	Authentic leadership and thriving among nurses: The mediating role of empathy.
	Mushtaq, Abid, Sarwar and Ahmed (2017)	Forging ahead: How to thrive at the modern workplace.
	Niessen, Mäder, Stride and Jimmieson (2017)	Thriving when exhausted: The role of perceived transformational leadership.
	Paterson, Luthans and Jeung (2014)	Thriving at work: Impact of psychological capital and supervisor support.
	Raza, Ali, Ahmed and Moueed (2017)	Impact of managerial coaching on employee performance and organizational citizenship behavior: intervening role of thriving at work.
	Russo, Buonocore, Carmeli and Guo (2018)	When family supportive supervisors meet employees' need for caring: Implications for work-family enrichment and thriving.
	Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens and Smith (2016)	A multilevel model of employee innovation: Understanding the effects of regulatory focus, thriving, and employee involvement climate.
	Walumbwa, Muchiri, Misati, Wu and Meiliani (2018)	Inspired to perform: A multilevel investigation of antecedents and consequences of thriving at work.
	Xu, Zhao, Li and Lin (2017)	Authentic leadership and employee creativity: Testing the multilevel mediation model.
	Xu, Loi and Chow (2019)	What threatens retail employees' thriving at work under leader-member exchange? The role of store spatial crowding and team negative affective tone.
	Xu and Wang (2019)	How and when servant leaders enable collective thriving: The role of team-member exchange and political climate.
Yang, Li, Liang, and Zhang, (2019)	Why and when paradoxical leader behavior impact employee creativity: Thriving at work and psychological safety.	
High quality relationships	Hennekam (2017)	Thriving of older workers.

	Jiang, Hu, Wang, and Jiang (2019)	Knowledge hiding as a barrier to thriving: The mediating role of psychological safety and moderating role of organizational cynicism.
	Kabat-Farr and Cortina (2017)	Receipt of interpersonal citizenship: Fostering agentic emotion, cognition, and action in organizations.
	Ling, Hunter and Maple (2014)	Navigating the challenges of trauma counselling: How counsellors thrive and sustain their engagement.
	Liu and Bern-Klug (2013)	Nursing home social services directors who report thriving at work.
	Mushtaq, Abid, Sarwar and Ahmed (2017)	Forging ahead: How to thrive at the modern workplace.
	Ren, Yunlu, Shaffer and Fodchuk (2015)	Expatriate success and thriving: The influence of job deprivation and emotional stability.
	Sarkar and Fletcher (2014)	Ordinary magic, extraordinary performance: Psychological resilience and thriving in high achievers.
	Sim, Zanardelli, Loughran, Mannarino and Hill (2016)	Thriving, burnout, and coping strategies of early and later career counseling center psychologists in the United States.
	Sumsion (2004)	Early childhood teachers' constructions of their resilience and thriving.
	Travis, Lee, Faulkner, Gerstenblatt and Boston (2014)	Cultivating a thriving childcare workforce: A theory-driven qualitative analysis.
	Walumbwa, Muchiri, Misati, Wu and Meiliani (2018)	Inspired to perform: A multilevel investigation of antecedents and consequences of thriving at work.
	Wendt, Tuckey and Prosser (2011)	Thriving, not just surviving, in emotionally demanding fields of practice.
	Xu, Zhao, Li and Lin (2017)	Authentic leadership and employee creativity: Testing the multilevel mediation model.
	Xu, Loi and Chow (2019)	What threatens retail employees' thriving at work under leader-member exchange? The role of store spatial crowding and team negative affective tone.
	Xu and Wang (2019)	How and when servant leaders enable collective thriving: The role of team-member exchange and political climate.
	Zhang et al. (2018)	High-performance work system and employee performance: The mediating roles of social exchange and thriving and the moderating effect of employee proactive personality.
	Zhao et al. (2018)	Impact of workplace violence against nurses' thriving at work, job satisfaction and turnover intention: A cross-sectional study.
Responsibility for meaningful work	Cullen, Gerbasi and Chrobot-Mason (2018)	Thriving in central network positions: The role of political skill.
	Gerbasi, Porath, Parker, Spreitzer and Cross (2015)	Destructive de-energizing relationships: How thriving buffers their effect on performance.

	Gkorezis, Bellou and Petridou (2016)	Greek academics' intention to migrate during financial crisis: A moderated mediation model.
	Jiang, Jiang, and Nielsen (2019)	Workplace thriving in China.
	Ling, Hunter and Maple (2014)	Navigating the challenges of trauma counselling: How counsellors thrive and sustain their engagement.
	Liu and Bern-Klug (2013)	Nursing home social services directors who report thriving at work.
	Prem, Ohly, Kubicek and Korunka (2017)	Thriving on challenge stressors? Exploring time pressure and learning demands as antecedents of thriving at work.
	Ren, Yunlu, Shaffer and Fodchuk (2015)	Expatriate success and thriving: The influence of job deprivation and emotional stability.
	Sarkar and Fletcher (2014)	Ordinary magic, extraordinary performance: Psychological resilience and thriving in high achievers.
	Sim, Zanardelli, Loughran, Mannarino and Hill (2016)	Thriving, burnout, and coping strategies of early and later career counseling center psychologists in the United States.
	Sumsion (2004)	Early childhood teachers' constructions of their resilience and thriving.
	Travis, Lee, Faulkner, Gerstenblatt and Boston (2014)	Cultivating a thriving childcare workforce: A theory-driven qualitative analysis.
	Wendt, Tuckey and Prosser (2011)	Thriving, not just surviving, in emotionally demanding fields of practice.
A determinant of positive organisational outcomes	Abid, Zahra and Ahmed (2015)	Mediated mechanism of thriving at work between perceived organization support, innovative work behavior and turnover Intention.
	Anjum, Marri and Khan (2016)	Thriving at work: Evidences from telecom companies in Balochistan.
	Carmeli and Spreitzer (2009)	Trust, connectivity, and thriving: Implications for innovative behaviours at work.
	Frazier and Tupper (2018)	Supervisor prosocial motivation, employee thriving, and helping behavior: A trickle-down model of psychological safety.
	Gerbasi, Porath, Parker, Spreitzer and Cross (2015)	Destructive de-energizing relationships: How thriving buffers their effect on performance.
	Gkorezis, Bellou and Petridou (2016)	Greek academics' intention to migrate during financial crisis: A moderated mediation model.
	Jaiswal and Dhar (2017)	The influence of servant leadership, trust in leader and thriving on employee creativity.
	KoÇAk and Agun (2019)	Explaining employee voice behavior through intragroup relationship quality and the role of thriving at work.
	Paterson, Luthans and Jeung (2014)	Thriving at work: Impact of psychological capital and supervisor support.

	Raza, Ali, Ahmed and Moueed (2017)	Impact of managerial coaching on employee performance and organizational citizenship behavior: intervening role of thriving at work.
	Ren, Yunlu, Shaffer and Fodchuk (2015)	Expatriate success and thriving: The influence of job deprivation and emotional stability.
	Riaz, Xu and Hussain (2018)	Understanding employee innovative behavior and thriving at work: A Chinese perspective.
	Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens and Smith (2016)	A multilevel model of employee innovation: Understanding the effects of regulatory focus, thriving, and employee involvement climate.
	Walumbwa, Muchiri, Misati, Wu and Meiliani (2018)	Inspired to perform: A multilevel investigation of antecedents and consequences of thriving at work.
	Xu, Zhao, Li and Lin (2017)	Authentic leadership and employee creativity: Testing the multilevel mediation model.
	Yang, Li, Liang, and Zhang, (2019)	Why and when paradoxical leader behavior impact employee creativity: Thriving at work and psychological safety.

Appendix E: Ethics Proposal, Participant Information and Consent

Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee (FHMREC)

Lancaster University

Application for Ethical Approval for Research involving

direct contact with human participants

Instructions *[for additional advice on completing this form, hover PC mouse over 'guidance']*

1. Apply to the committee by submitting:
 - a. The University's **Stage 1 Self-Assessment (part A only)** and the **Project Questionnaire**. These are available on the Research Support Office website: [LU Ethics](#)
 - b. The completed application **FHMREC form**
 - c. Your full research proposal (background, literature review, methodology/methods, ethical considerations)
 - d. All accompanying research materials such as, but not limited to,
 - 1) Advertising materials (posters, e-mails)
 - 2) Letters/emails of invitation to participate
 - 3) Participant information sheets
 - 4) Consent forms
 - 5) Questionnaires, surveys, demographic sheets
 - 6) Interview schedules, interview question guides, focus group scripts
 - 7) Debriefing sheets, resource lists

Please note that you DO NOT need to submit pre-existing handbooks or measures, which support your work, but which cannot be amended following ethical review. These should simply be referred to in your application form.

2. Submit all the materials electronically as a **SINGLE email attachment in PDF format** by the deadline date. **Before converting to PDF ensure all comments are hidden by going into 'Review' in the menu above then choosing *show markup>balloons>show all revisions in line*.**
3. Submit one **collated and signed** paper copy of the full application materials in time for the FHMREC meeting. If the applicant is a student, the paper copy of the application form must be signed by the Academic Supervisor.
4. Committee meeting dates and application submission dates are listed on the [FHMREC website](#). Applications must be submitted by the deadline date, to:

Dr Diane Hopkins
B14, Furness College
Lancaster University,

LA1 4YG

d.hopkins@lancaster.ac.uk

5. Prior to the FHMREC meeting you may be contacted by the lead reviewer for further clarification of your application.
6. Attend the committee meeting on the day that the application is considered, if required to do so.

1. **Title of Project:** Exploring the experience of thriving at work among managers

2. **Name of applicant/researcher:** Emma Judge

3. **Type of study**

Includes *direct* involvement by human subjects.

Involves existing documents/data only, or the evaluation of an existing project with no direct contact with human participants. Please complete the University Stage 1 Self-Assessment part B. This is available on the Research Support Office website: [LU Ethics](#).

Submit this, along with all project documentation, to Diane Hopkins.

4. If this is a student project, please indicate what type of project by marking the relevant box: (please note that UG and taught PG projects should complete **FHMREC form UG-tPG**, following the procedures set out on the [FHMREC website](#))

PG Diploma Masters dissertation DClinPsy SRP PhD Thesis PhD Pall. Care

PhD Pub. Health PhD Org. Health & Well Being PhD Mental Health MD

DClinPsy Thesis

5. Appointment/position held by applicant and Division within FHM Student,

Organizational Health and Well Being

6. Contact information for applicant:

E-mail: e.judge@lancaster.ac.uk **Telephone:** 07823 336616 (please give a number on which you can be contacted at short notice)

Address: Gold Hill Cottage, Gold Hill East, Chalfont St Peter, Bucks SL9 9DG

7. Project supervisor(s), if different from applicant: Dr Alison Collins and Dr Sabir Giga

8. Appointment held by supervisor(s) and institution(s) where based (if applicable): Dr

Alison Collins - Lecturer and Director of Studies in Organisational Health and Well Being, Lancaster University. Dr Sabir Giga - Senior Lecturer in Organisational Health and Well Being, Lancaster University.

9. Names and appointments of all members of the research team (including degree where applicable)

Emma Judge, Student, Organisational Health and Wellbeing.

10. Summary of research protocol in lay terms (indicative maximum length 150 words):

This qualitative research seeks to explore how managers experience thriving at work and the contextual factors necessary for thriving they identify, in order to add to our understanding of the positive experience of work.

The objectives of this research are therefore to:

- Explore how individual managers experience thriving at work
- Examine the contextual factors managers identify as important to thriving at work
- Explore how individual managers describe the outcomes of thriving at work
- Explore how thriving at work differs in different organisations and contexts.

The study will invite managers in two different organisations to take part in a semi-structured interview to explore their experience of thriving at work. The interview will make use of the Critical Incident Technique to recall a time at work when they perceived themselves to be thriving. Responses to a series of open questions and relevant, appropriate follow up questions will be analysed using a thematic template approach in order to identify themes and differences.

11. Anticipated project dates (month and year only)

Start date: August 2015 End date: March 2017

12. Please describe the sample of participants to be studied (including maximum & minimum number, age, gender):

The population being studied are managers working for two large organisations in the UK (i.e. not self-employed or small enterprises). Each of these organisations should employ at least 300 managers in the UK in order to ensure that a viable sample is obtained. It is

anticipated that the response rate will be low given the time commitment required to take part. The sample will be made up of adult, male and female participants, aged between 18 and 65 years, who are managers. Managers are defined as those employees who manage other employees. The sample size will be between 22 and 30 participants, consisting of between 11 and 15 from each of the two organisations. Interviews will be arranged on a first come first served basis and in the event of more than 15 participants coming forward from one organisation further expressions of interest will receive an email thanking them for their interest and informing them that the numbers required for the study have already been met.

13. How will participants be recruited and from where? Be as specific as possible.

Following ethical approval from Lancaster University two organisations will be approached to take part in this research. The researcher knows the organisations but plays no active role in either one. These organisations were selected on the basis that they represent two very different contexts, have over 300 managers that could be invited to participate and are likely to agree to participate. In the event that they decide not to take part further candidate organisations known to the researcher will be approached.

The initial request will be made by the researcher via email, followed up by a telephone conversation or meeting. If the organisation expresses an interest in taking part, they will be provided with an Organisation Information Sheet to ensure that they fully understand their role in the research and what will be asked of participants. Once they have satisfied any internal approval protocols they may have, the organisation will then send out an email on their internal email system to all managers inviting them to take part in this research study. The email will be jointly signed by a senior manager within the organisation and the principal researcher and will outline the purpose of the study and what individuals will be required to

do if they agree to take part. It will clearly describe participation as voluntary and seek to ensure that individuals do not feel in any way coerced in to taking part. The email will also inform their managers that data collected during the interview will be kept confidential by the researcher and will be reported in such a way as protect anonymity. It will reassure the managers that the organisation will not have access to any of the interviews and will not be informed of the specific contribution of any individual taking part. The limits to this confidentiality (as outlined in question 19) will be clearly stated in the Participant Information Sheet that will be sent to all potential participants before they agree to take part in the interview and will be discussed before the interview commences, but will not be highlighted at this stage as it may deter managers from expressing an interest. Given that the topic is not unduly sensitive this is felt to be an appropriate approach that balances the need to encourage participation and to ensure that those who do eventually participate fully understand the limits to the confidentiality they can expect. The managers will be asked to opt-in to the study by contacting the researcher directly by email if they are interested in participating. A reminder email will be sent out two weeks after the initial invitation, repeating the same information.

On receipt of an expression of interest from an individual by email the researcher will reply thanking them for their interest, suggesting a time and place for the interview and attaching a Participant Information Sheet. The potential participant will be asked to read this information sheet before agreeing to the interview. Informed consent will also be requested at the beginning of the interview.

Should the situation arise whereby the researcher has completed enough interviews for the purposes of the research and further expressions of interest are received, the researcher will

respond by email thanking them for considering taking part and explaining that the required number of interviews have been completed.

14. What procedure is proposed for obtaining consent?

At the beginning of each interview all participants will be asked if they have any questions about the information provided on the participant information sheet. They will have already received the Participant Information Sheet by email and a hard copy will be available in the interview for them to keep. Participants will be asked to read and agree or disagree with a list of statements that establish informed consent. The interview will not proceed unless they have agreed to the statements and they will be given the option to choose not to agree and not to proceed with the interview.

Participants will also be informed of the limits to confidentiality in relation to what is said in the interview. If what is said in the interview makes the researcher think that the participant, or someone else, are at significant risk of harm, the researcher will have to break confidentiality and speak to another member of the research team about the issue. If possible, the researcher will tell the participant if this is necessary.

They will also be reminded that they are able to decline to answer any of the questions, stop the interview at any time and withdraw from the research for up to 2 weeks after the interview.

15. What discomfort (including psychological e.g. distressing or sensitive topics), inconvenience or danger could be caused by participation in the project? Please indicate plans to address these potential risks. State the timescales within which participants may withdraw from the study, noting your reasons.

It is not anticipated that any undue psychological discomfort, distress or danger should occur as a result of taking part in this study. However, the reflection encouraged by the interview may raise concerns, particularly in relation to the absence of thriving in their

work. The Participant Information Sheet suggests individuals contact their GP in this instance. If any distress arises during the course of the interview the researcher will stop the interview, allow the participant time to recover and decide if they wish to continue or leave the interview. Participants will be informed in the Participant Information Sheet and the Informed Consent that they can withdraw from the study at any point during the interview and for a period of up to 2 weeks following the interview. Once the interview has been anonymised and analysed it will not be possible to withdraw the information provided by the participant.

Participants may experience anxiety if they believe that their employer will have access to the information provided in the interviews – either by being given copies of the recordings or transcripts or by verbal or written reports by the researcher about individual interviews. The invitation email, Participant Information Sheet and informed consent will emphasise that this is not the case, with the exception that if what is said in the interview makes the researcher think that the participant, or someone else, are at significant risk of harm, the researcher will have to break confidentiality and speak to another member of the research team about the issue. If possible, the researcher will tell the participant if this is necessary.

16. What potential risks may exist for the researcher(s)? Please indicate plans to address such risks (for example, noting the support available to you; counselling considerations arising from the sensitive or distressing nature of the research/topic; details of the lone worker plan you will follow, and the steps you will take).

No specific risks to the researcher are expected during this project. Interviews will take place in the workplace or in a quiet but public place such as a hotel lobby. Given that the researcher may be alone with the interviewee, in a public place a lone worker plan has been developed to make sure that due care is taken to ensure their safety and security.

17. While we do not generally expect direct benefits to participants as a result of this research, please state here any that result from completion of the study.

There may be no direct benefit to participants as a result of taking part. However, participants may gain a better understanding of their levels of thriving at work as a result of taking the time to answer the interview questions.

18. Details of any incentives/payments (including out-of-pocket expenses) made to participants:

Participating organisations and individuals will be offered a copy of a report that summarises the findings of the research.

19. Briefly describe your data collection and analysis methods, and the rationale for their use. Please include details of how the confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be ensured, and the limits to confidentiality.

Interviews will take place either in a suitable meeting room in the workplace or a quiet public place. Following informed consent interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder, subject to the participant's agreement. Every effort will be made to protect anonymity at both the data collection and interpretation and reporting stages. During interviews care will be taken not to refer to previous or subsequent interviews, and knowledge of other individuals in the organisation by the interviewer will be avoided. These interviews will then be transcribed by the researcher and will be anonymised as much as possible. All names, place names, departmental and project names and dates will be removed from the transcript in order to minimise the opportunity to identify individuals. Great care will be taken to ensure that any quotes used in any reporting of the research cannot be identified, and they will not be attributed. The transcripts will be analysed using a thematic template method and specific comments or sections of the transcript will be cross-

referenced to particular themes. It is anticipated that software such as NVivo will be used to manage this process.

The anonymity of the organisation will be protected by the use of generalised descriptions within the report. These descriptions will convey enough context to ensure the differences between the two organisations are clear, but not so much that they can be identified.

Access to the data will not be given to any third parties other than the researcher's supervisors. In particular the organisation will not have access to the data and the researcher will not inform the organisation of the identity of participants. It is possible, however that organisations will know who has taken part as work emails are being used, the meeting may take place in the workplace and is likely to appear in the manager's diary. If this is a concern to the participant, they do have the option to be interviewed in a location outside the organisation. A further limit to confidentiality would occur if an interviewee were to say something in the interview that places either themselves, or someone else, at significant risk of harm. In this instance the researcher will be required to break confidentiality and speak to her supervisors about the issue. If possible, the researcher will tell the participant if this is necessary.

These limits to confidentiality will be explained to the participating organisations and the individual in the relevant Information Sheet and at the beginning of the interview before Informed Consent is requested.

20. If relevant, describe the involvement of your target participant group in the *design and conduct* of your research.

The interview guide will be piloted with one or two potential participants before the research commences.

21. What plan is in place for the storage of data (electronic, digital, paper, etc.)? Please ensure that your plans comply with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Each transcript will be identified by a unique code that will be linked to the individual's identity in a separate file. All files will be password-protected and stored on the University of Lancaster server.

Files generated and required for the analysis software (i.e. NVivo) will be stored on the University of Lancaster Servers as password protected files when not in use. When in use they will be stored temporarily on the researcher's computer as password protected files. At the end of each session of analysis the files will be removed from the researcher's computer.

The identity of the two organisations will also be coded and the codes will be stored in a password-protected file on the University server.

All transcripts and other data files will remain on the Lancaster University servers for a period of 10 years, following submission of my PhD thesis, as encrypted files. My supervisor Dr Alison Collins will be responsible for data storage and deletion.

22. Will audio or video recording take place? no audio video

If yes, what arrangements have been made for audio/video data storage? At what point in the research will tapes/digital recordings/files be destroyed?

A portable digital recording device will be used to record the interviews and the audio files will be transferred to the Lancaster University servers within 24 hours of each interview. The audio files will then immediately be deleted from the portable recording device. Until such time as the files are transferred and deleted the device will be stored securely by the researcher.

The original recordings will then be stored electronically on the Lancaster University servers and will be encrypted, and password protected. Furthermore, audio recordings will be deleted once the research has been completed and examined. My supervisor Dr Alison Collins will be responsible for data storage and deletion.

23. What are the plans for dissemination of findings from the research? If you are a student, include here your thesis.

The results of this study will inform the researcher's PhD submission. It is anticipated that this research will be of interest to both practitioners and researches in the field of leadership development and positive organisational scholarship. Therefore, results will be submitted for publication in academic and practitioner journals and opportunities to present at relevant conferences will be sought.

24. What particular ethical considerations, not previously noted on this application, do you think there are in the proposed study? Are there any matters about which you wish to seek guidance from the FHMREC?

No additional ethical problems are anticipated.

Signatures: Applicant:

Date:

*Project Supervisor (if applicable):

Date:

*I have reviewed this application and discussed it with the applicant. I confirm that the project methodology is appropriate. I am happy for this application to proceed to ethical review.

Applicant: Emma Judge
Supervisor: Jane Simpson
Department: Health Research
FHMREC Reference: FHMREC18040

19 December 2018

Dear Emma

Re: Exploring the experience of thriving at work amongst managers

Thank you for submitting your research ethics amendment application for the above project for review by the **Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee (FHMREC)**. The application was recommended for approval by FHMREC, and on behalf of the Chair of the Committee, I can confirm that approval has been granted for the amendment to this research project.

As principal investigator your responsibilities include:

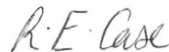
- ensuring that (where applicable) all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained;
- reporting any ethics-related issues that occur during the course of the research or arising from the research to the Research Ethics Officer at the email address below (e.g. unforeseen ethical issues, complaints about the conduct of the research, adverse reactions such as extreme distress);
- submitting details of proposed substantive amendments to the protocol to the Research Ethics Officer for approval.

Please contact me if you have any queries or require further information.

Tel:- 01542 593987

Email:- fhmresearchsupport@lancaster.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,



Becky Case
Research Ethics Officer, Secretary to FHMREC.

Supporting Documents

1. Email inviting organisations to take part.
2. Organisation Information Sheet.
3. Lone Worker Plan
4. Email inviting participants to take part.
5. Email to encourage participation.
6. Initial Email in response to expression of interest.
7. Participant Information Sheet.
8. Participant Consent Form.
9. Email in response to expression of interest if participation not required.

1. Email inviting organisations to take part.

Dear _____,

[Opening paragraph appropriate to context, depending on whether the recipient is known and whether this is the first time the research has been discussed].

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this research project, which will inform my PhD Dissertation at the University of Lancaster in the area of Organisational Health and Well Being.

The purpose of this study is to explore managers' experience of thriving at work in order to better understand the factors that influence thriving at work, how they may differ across organisations and the benefits of thriving at work to both the individual and the organisation. As organisations continually look for innovative ways to develop their leaders and maximise potential it is hoped that this study will inform leadership development in the future.

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to invite all managers within your organisation to participate in an interview that will take between 45 and 60 minutes. The questions in the interview will explore a particular time when the individual was thriving at work.

Once the responses have been analysed you will receive a report that provides insight into the concept of thriving at work and allow you to compare the themes identified by managers in your organisation to those of a very different organisation. I would also be happy to come in and discuss the findings with you. The report is intended to be a useful and practical tool, providing you with greater insight into your management group and how to increase their capacity to thrive at work.

I attach an Organisation Information Sheet with further information about the study and hope that you will feel able to take part. If you have any questions, please contact me on this email or 07823 336616.

[Sign off as appropriate)

Emma Judge

PhD Student

University of Lancaster

2. Organisation Information Sheet

Organisation Information Sheet

An Exploration of the Experience of Thriving Among Managers

This research is being conducted by Emma Judge, a student in the Organisational Health and Well Being Doctorate Programme at Lancaster University, Lancaster, United Kingdom.

What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of thriving at work among managers in the UK, what supports thriving at work and the benefits for the individual and the organisation. We are interested in times when managers have felt that you were thriving at work - when they felt most engaged and energised in their work. The study will identify the themes in what people describe as important in these times, what causes them to feel this way and whether or not they see this experience as beneficial to themselves or the organisation.

Why have we been approached?

You have been approached because your organisation is a large employer in the UK.

Do we have to take part?

No. It's completely up to your organisation to decide whether or not to take part. There will be no negative consequences should you decide not to take part.

What will the organisation be asked to do if we take part?

If you decide to take part, you may need to satisfy any internal protocols required. You will then be asked to send an email to all managers within your organisation inviting them to take part in an interview that will take 45 to 60 minutes. The wording of the invitation email will be provided and will be jointly signed by you and the principal researcher. Your managers will be asked to contact the researcher directly if they are interested in taking part. The timing of this invitation can be at your discretion, but we ask that one further email to encourage participation be sent 2 weeks later. The wording of these emails will also be provided. It is anticipated that between 11 and 15 people will be interviewed and the interview will be focused on how they experience thriving at work. You will not be asked to share the names of those you have invited to participate, only the total number of invitations sent.

Will the data be confidential?

In the process of the research data will be collected by the researcher including an email address, age (within a range), time in role, time in organisation and a recording of the interview. The

email address will only be used to send them more information on the interview process and to arrange the meeting and will not be divulged to any third parties.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The recordings and transcripts will be stored as password protected files on the servers of the University of Lancaster. Individual codes will be used to link each recording and transcript with the participant and the file of these codes will be password protected and kept on the Lancaster University server. The recordings will be kept until the research has been completed and examined and the transcripts will be kept on the University of Lancaster servers as encrypted files for 10 years after the study has finished.

The researcher will not inform the organisation about who chooses to participate. However, it is recognised that this information may be available to the organisation given that work emails are being used for communication, the meetings are likely to take place in the workplace and will appear in their diaries.

Transcripts of the interviews will be anonymised as much as possible – all references to individuals, places, dates and projects will be removed. Any quotes from interviews used in reporting will not be attributed and care will be taken to ensure that source of the quote cannot be identified. The specific content of any interview will not be shared with anyone other than the supervisors of the principal researcher. The exception to this would be if an interviewee were to say something in the interview that places either themselves, or someone else, at significant risk of harm. In this instance the researcher will be required to break confidentiality and speak to her supervisors about the issue. If possible, the researcher will tell the participant if this is necessary.

The name of your organisation will not appear in the data but will be linked to a code that will be stored in a password protected file on the University's servers. In any discussion or presentation of results organisations taking part will not be named, but broadly described by sector and size.

What will happen to the results?

The results will be summarised and reported in a PhD thesis and may be submitted for publication in an academic or professional journal. Your organisation will receive a summary report of the findings. This report will not have any information included that could identify individual data, or who took part and who didn't.

Are there any risks?

There are no risks anticipated with participating in this study. However, if participants are concerned following participation, they are encouraged to contact their GP or the Employee Assistance Programme for your organisation, if applicable.

Are there any benefits to taking part?

Participants may gain a better understanding of their levels of thriving at work as a result of taking the time to answer the interview questions, but there are no direct benefits in taking part. The organisation receives a report as described above, as does each participant. The report will aim to help

your organisation understand the factors that influence thriving at work among your managers and discuss the implications of this for management development, engagement and performance.

Who has reviewed the project?

This study has been reviewed by the Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee, and approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at Lancaster University.

Where can I obtain further information about the study if I need it?

If you have any questions about the study, please contact the main researcher:

Emma Judge

e.judge@lancaster.ac.uk

Tel: 07823 336616

Or the supervisors for this research:

Dr Alison Collins

a.m.collins@lancaster.ac.uk

Dr. Sabir Giga

s.giga@lancaster.ac.uk

Complaints

If you wish to make a complaint or raise concerns about any aspect of this study and do not want to speak to the researcher, you can contact:

Professor Bruce Hollingsworth Tel: (01524) 594154

Professor of Health Economics Email: b.hollingsworth@lancaster.ac.uk

Faculty of Health and Medicine

Division of Health Research

Lancaster University

Lancaster LA1 4YG

If you wish to speak to someone outside of the Organisational Health and Well Being Doctorate Programme, you may also contact:

Professor Roger Pickup Tel: (01524) 593746

Associate Dean for Research Email: r.pickup@lancaster.ac.uk

Faculty of Health and Medicine

Division of Biomedical and Life Sciences

Lancaster University

Lancaster LA1 4YD

Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet.

3. Lone Worker Plan

The following actions will be taken to minimise the risk to the researcher when conducting interviews.

1. The researcher will re-read the booklet provided by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust entitled “Lone Working” before the interviews commence to reinforce the need to follow the actions set out below and establish the appropriate level of concern for her own safety.
2. Participants will first be offered the chance to conduct the interview in the workplace and a non-workplace setting will only be suggested if this proves to be inconvenient for the participant or a suitable meeting room cannot be found.
3. If a public venue is to be used, the interview will only take place in locations known to the researcher. The researcher will ensure that they know the surroundings well including where they could go for help and which areas of the venue are most suitable for a quiet conversation but have good exits should the need arise.
4. If a meeting room in the workplace is used the researcher will take note of their surroundings and possible exits, including how the door to the room opens.
5. If at any point the researcher feels uncomfortable or threatened, they will generate a reason to stop the interview and leave.
6. The researcher will tell a designated individual where and when they are meeting a participant and include the necessary contact details for the workplace or public venue where the meeting is taking place. The researcher will send a text to this individual when the meeting has finished, and the participant has left. If the designated individual does not receive a text within 2 hours of the end of the meeting, they will attempt to contact the researcher by text and phone. If they are unable to make contact with the researcher, they will contact the workplace or venue where the interview was taking place to establish if the researcher is still at the venue. If no contact has been

made with the researcher within 4 hours of the end of the meeting the designated individual will contact the police.

7. The researcher will have their mobile phone with them at all times and the tracing facility on this phone will be switched on and available to the designated individual mentioned above.

These actions are based on advice from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust (Suzy Lamplugh Trust) , Lancaster University Guidance on Field Work (Lancaster University, 2010) and Saunders et al. (2012, pp. 244).

4. Email inviting participants to take part.

Dear [personal name if possible],

[Company name] has agreed to take part in a research study to investigate how managers experience thriving at work. As we continually look for innovative ways to develop our leaders and maximise potential it is hoped that this study will inform our management development in the future [and/or sentence appropriate to the organisation's context].

We are asking all managers within [Company name] to consider having a conversation with a researcher from the University of Lancaster. This is likely to last about 45 minutes to an hour and will focus on your own experiences of thriving at work. The meeting can take place in the workplace or a public venue outside the workplace if this is more convenient. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to take part. Information gathered from your interview will not be shared with anyone else in the organisation and anonymised for the purposes of the research. If you decide to express an interest in taking part further information on how the study will work and what will happen to your responses will be provided before you make a decision to participate.

We believe that this is an area that is important to study – we don't know enough about the positive aspects of work - and if you decide to take part you will help develop that understanding. If you would like to express an interest or have any questions this won't be taken as a firm commitment but please email Emma Judge, the principal researcher, at e.judge@lancaster.ac.uk.

[Appropriate Sign off]

Name	Emma Judge
Title	University of Lancaster

5. Email to encourage participation.

Dear [personal name if possible],

Two weeks ago we sent you an invitation to participate in a research study looking at your experience of thriving at work.

If you have already decided not to participate or have made contact with the researcher please ignore this email, but if you have not yet done so we would like to take this opportunity to remind you that your input is very important for the study. [Sentence that puts this research in to the context of the organisation, if required].

We believe that this is an area that is important to study – we don't know enough about the positive aspects of work - and if you decide to take part you will help develop that understanding. If you would like to express an interest or have any questions this won't be taken as a firm commitment but please email Emma Judge, the principal researcher, at e.judge@lancaster.ac.uk.

[Appropriate Sign off]

Name	Emma Judge
Title	University of Lancaster

6. Email in response to an expression of interest

Dear [name],

Thank you for expressing an interest in taking part in my study on thriving at work – your willingness to consider getting involved is greatly appreciated.

I attach a Participant Information Sheet that contains all the information that you may need to consider before agreeing to take part in the study. I would be very grateful if you could read this and then let me know if you would like to participate. If you have any questions before making this decision, I would be happy to answer them.

I will then contact you to arrange a time to meet for 45 minutes to an hour. This can be at your workplace if this is most convenient. During this meeting I will be asking you a series of questions about your views on thriving at work, and your own experiences of thriving at work.

Thank you again for considering participation – I hope that you feel able to take part and I look forward to meeting you in person.

Best wishes

Emma Judge

Principal Researcher
Lancaster University

7. Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

An Exploration of the Experience of Thriving Among Managers

This research is being conducted by Emma Judge, a student in the Organisational Health and Well Being Doctorate Programme at Lancaster University, Lancaster, United Kingdom.

What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of thriving at work among managers in the UK, what supports thriving at work and the benefits for the individual and the organisation. We are interested in times when you have felt that you were thriving at work - when you felt most engaged and energised in your work. The study will identify the themes in what people describe as important in these times, what causes them to feel this way and whether or not they see this experience as beneficial to themselves or the organisation.

Why have I been approached?

You have been approached because your organisation has agreed to take part and the study requires information from people within organisations who manage others.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. There will be no negative consequences should you decide not to take part.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

The researcher will come to your place of work at a time convenient to you for an interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. The purpose of the interview is to understand your experiences of thriving at work. The interview will be recorded and transcribed to allow the researcher to carry out the necessary analysis. Interviews will be arranged on a first come, first served basis and if enough interviews have already been completed before you confirm that you would like to take part the researcher will let you know.

Will my data be confidential?

In the process of the research data will be collected by the researcher including your email address, age (within a range), time in role, time in organisation and a recording of the interview. The email address will only be used to send them more information on the interview process and to arrange the meeting and will not be divulged to any third parties.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed, and the recordings and transcripts stored as password protected files on the server of the University of Lancaster. Individual codes will be used to link each recording and transcript with the participant and the file of these codes will be password protected and kept on the Lancaster University server. The recordings will be kept until the research has been completed and examined and the data from the survey and transcripts will be kept on the University of Lancaster servers as encrypted files for 10 years after the study has finished.

The transcripts of the interview will be anonymised as much as possible – all references to individuals, places, dates and projects will be removed. Any quotes from interviews used in reporting will not be attributed and care will be taken to ensure that source of the quote cannot be identified. The specific content of any interview will not be shared with anyone other than the supervisors of the principal researcher. The exception to this would occur if an interviewee were to say something in the interview that places either themselves, or someone else, at significant risk of harm. In this instance the researcher will be required to break confidentiality and speak to her supervisors about the issue. If possible, the researcher will tell the participant if this is necessary.

The researcher will not inform the organisation about who chooses to participate. However, it is recognised that this information may be available to the organisation given that work emails are being used, the meetings are likely to take place in the workplace and will appear in their diaries.

What will happen to the results?

The results will be summarised and reported in a PhD thesis and may be submitted for publication in an academic or professional journal. Your organisation will receive a summary report of the findings, comparing the responses from this organisation to the overall sample. This report will not have any information included that could identify individual data, or who took part and who didn't. You will also receive a copy of the report.

If you wish to withdraw from the study after the meeting with the researcher, you may do so within 2 weeks of the meeting.

Are there any risks?

There are no risks anticipated with participating in this study. However, if you are concerned following participation you are encouraged to inform the researcher or to make use of the resources suggested at the end of this sheet.

Are there any benefits to taking part?

It is hoped that you may find participating interesting and the opportunity to reflect on when and how you thrive at work will be useful, but there are no direct benefits in taking part.

Who has reviewed the project?

This study has been reviewed by the Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee and approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at Lancaster University. Your organisation has also reviewed the study and satisfied any internal protocols required.

Where can I obtain further information about the study if I need it?

If you have any questions about the study, please contact the main researcher:

Emma Judge

e.judge@lancaster.ac.uk

Tel: 07823 336616

Or the supervisors for this research:

Dr Alison Collins

a.m.collins@lancaster.ac.uk

Dr. Sabir Giga

s.giga@lancaster.ac.uk

Complaints

If you wish to make a complaint or raise concerns about any aspect of this study and do not want to speak to the researcher, you can contact:

Professor Bruce Hollingsworth Tel: (01524) 594154

Professor of Health Economics

Email: b.hollingsworth@lancaster.ac.uk

Faculty of Health and Medicine

Division of Health Research

Lancaster University

Lancaster LA1 4YG

If you wish to speak to someone outside of the Organisational Health and Well Being Doctorate Programme, you may also contact:

Professor Roger Pickup Tel: (01524) 593746

Associate Dean for Research

Email: r.pickup@lancaster.ac.uk

Faculty of Health and Medicine

Division of Biomedical and Life Sciences

Lancaster University

Lancaster LA1 4YD

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Resources in the event of concern:

Should you feel distressed either as a result of taking part, or in the future, please contact your GP.

[If the organisation has an Employee Assistance Programme this will be added to the above.]

8. Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Study Title: Exploring the Experience of Thriving Among Managers

We are asking if you would like to take part in a research project to explore the experience of thriving at work among managers in the UK, what supports thriving at work and the benefits for the individual and the organisation.

Before you consent to participating in the study we ask that you read the Participant Information Sheet and mark each box below with your initials if you agree. If you have any questions or queries before signing the consent form please speak to the principal investigator, Emma Judge, who can be contacted via email at e.judge@lancaster.ac.uk.

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet and fully understand what is expected of me within this study -----
2. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask any questions and to have them answered. -----
3. I understand that my interview will be audio recorded and then made into an anonymised written transcript. -----
4. I understand that audio recordings will be kept until the research project has been examined. -----
5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. -----
6. I understand that once the data have been anonymised and incorporated into themes it might not be possible for my data to be withdrawn, though every attempt will be made to extract my data, up to the point of publication. -----
7. I understand that the information from my interview will be pooled with other participants' responses, anonymised and may be published -----
8. I consent to information and quotations from my interview being used in reports, conferences and training events. -----
9. I understand that any information given will remain strictly confidential and anonymous unless it is thought that there is a risk of harm to myself or others, in which case the principal investigator will need to share this information with her research supervisor. -----
10. I understand that the researcher will share and discuss data with her research supervisor. -----
11. I consent to Lancaster University keeping written transcriptions of the interview for 10 years after the study has finished. -----
12. I consent to take part in the above study. -----

Name of Participant: -----

Signature: -----

Date: -----

Name of Researcher: -----

Signature: -----

Date: -----

9. Email thanking someone who expressed an interest but is not needed

Dear [name],

Thank you very much for expressing an interest in taking part in this research study. In order to conduct the research I needed about 15 volunteers from [organisation name] and have been fortunate to have sufficient volunteers to take part in this study.

As a result I do not need to arrange any further interviews at this stage. I am very grateful for your interest and will be back in touch should the situation change.

Best wishes

Emma Judge

Principal Researcher

University of Lancaster

Appendix F: Interview Guide

1. Demographic – age range, how long with organisation, job.
2. How do you know if you are thriving at work?
3. Is thriving at work important to you? Why or why not?
4. Describe a time when you were thriving at work:
 - a. Tell me about it – what were you doing at the time, where were you, who were you with?
 - b. How did you know you were thriving?
 - c. Was there anything that happened that allowed you to thrive?
 - d. If you can't think of a time when you have thrived what do you think has got in the way.
5. Do you find that there is a relationship between thriving at work and other areas of your life? When you have been thriving at work does it increase your thriving at home for instance?
 - Can you have too much thriving at work?
6. Can you think of someone you work with who is thriving?
 - a. What makes you think that?
 - b. How can you tell?
 - c. What is making it possible for them to thrive?
7. Add in questions if new themes emerge.
8. Is there anything that we haven't covered in terms of thriving at work that you think is important?

Appendix G: Quotes Reflecting the Integrative Theme of Mutual Trust

Good relationships/Getting on with line manager.

I think it came down to his attitude which was literally, "we're in this together, whatever we produce."

Participant 4, Organisation A

He just listened to me when (laugh) umm, because obviously they're the other pair of eyes that put me in the uncomfortable positions as well, so they're saying oh yeah I think you need to do this or I would like you to do that or you know, this is an opportunity, and I'll go, does anyone want to volunteer for this and I'm thinking no (laughter) this will be really good for you, I know, go away (laughter) leave me alone.

Participant 5, Organisation A

Whoever my line manager is, is very important, that you have that chemistry.

Participant 8, Organisation A

The person who came in, and has now left the company as well, she, it happens a lot with leaders, if you don't come in and change loads of stuff you're not doing something. So she did root and branch changes, ripped them apart, broke up the unit that we were working in, split it across two different bits and things like that and it very quickly destroyed the atmosphere.

Participant 9, Organisation A

I worked hard, he worked hard, I was knowledgeable, he was more knowledgeable, he was engaging, he was open to ideas and we all really just mucked in together to get it done.

Participant 3, Organisation B

I think the principle lies with your manager more than the people you work for, and I spoke a lot about my manager and line managers and upwards rather than downwards.

Participant 3, Organisation B

I think all individuals are essentially the same, some you get on with some you don't get on with, if they're in a bad place it's even harder, if everyone's in a great place then everyone generally gets on with each other and everyone is in a generally good place because he's done a good job at creating a good dynamic.

Participant 4, Organisation B

I think most importantly for me is just a boss that you respect and can get on with because you have to spend so much time with them that you don't want a boss who you just can't stand the sight of them.

Participant 6, Organisation B

In my previous job I had a terrible, absolutely awful relationship with my boss who didn't like me personally, I didn't like him either and felt I was really bad at my job and that definitely had a very negative impact because it feels like everything is pointless.

Participant 6, Organisation B

We got on very well and we had regular catch ups and I could be very challenging with him and he was very open to challenge.

Participant 8, Organisation B

I don't think you really notice if you have a weak leader until somebody comes in, he's absolutely fantastic and I think that the difference that it makes. I think there can be a vacuum and you just get on with it. But then if somebody new comes in who's a very skilled leader and really brings everybody along, then you realise how important it is.

Participant 8, Organisation B

I think managers are really, really important because I think that can really make or break, I think if I had a really bad manager it would have a serious impact on say my wellbeing and my thriving probably above and beyond a lot of other things that we've talked about.

Participant 11, Organisation B

I guess in terms of this particular person's leadership it was probably wasn't particularly inspirational in that way, but there was a recognition that the hard work and the graft was what was going to get us the outcome and that that kind of stuff was to just manage people at the top of the shop, I quite liked that, I quite respected that ... it's more about that individual kind of relationship.

Participant 12, Organisation B

I had a really bad relationship with my boss at the time that at the end of that he sort of let me do things on my own, so even though that bit of it had been really, really bad, him leaving me to do that on my own was a good thing, so I don't really know how that works, but that bit was good.

Participant 14, Organisation B

Good relationships/Being part of a cohesive team.

If you're surrounded by people that are happy, motivated, doing well, they're thriving in their workplace or even outside ... I think it's more difficult to be down about what's going on or whatever it is that you feel down about, if other people are thriving around you.

Participant 1, Organisation A

For me it's about the team, it's about the people or you know if when I used to work on (TYPE OF PROJECT), it was about the whole study team and making sure that the study was running well that everybody was working well together.

Participant 2, Organisation A

I suppose the only thing we haven't talked about is environment and partly environment comes from individuals around you and where you may feel different sorts of pressure and I think that can be positive or not positive.

Participant 5, Organisation A

That makes me thrive, because you know I feel as if that as a team, we're working to the same objectives, ... it's that everyone is working to the same objective and believes and is passionate.

Participant 6, Organisation A

I think negativity if you haven't got a team where everybody's prepared to pull their weight, you start getting disgruntlement in the team.

Participant 8, Organisation A

There was very much a very happy type of work environment where everybody was kind of driving to all the same point, everybody felt they were making a difference and it was just a great place to work sort of kind of goal.

Participant 9, Organisation A

Obviously the colleagues around you were important to it and we worked very much as a team and were very collaborative as well. You know there were disagreements and things ... but there was a lot more collaboration and again because everybody was in it together kind of thing.

Participant 10, Organisation A

Also, the team of people were really engaged, there was a really good sort of sense of team camaraderie and we were all basically working towards the same end. That was really good, I enjoyed that.

Participant 11, Organisation A

I think with scientific colleagues if we get interested in a particular finding, we are mostly scientists, curious and driven by solving scientific problems and we're here doing it here because we're also interested in what the end purpose of all of that is, which is the generation of medicines for patients and their treatments.

Participant 13, Organisation A

You know the culture around you is really important obviously, so those are the people who can pick you up when they can see that you're down and so, there's a big component of the interaction of where you are.

Participant 14, Organisation A

I think if I was doing it in isolation and I couldn't see the implication and people doing similar around me then that would have been more challenging I think, and to see other people having the same sorts of challenges was important so you're not doing it in a vacuum.

Participant 14, Organisation A

I had an amazing leadership team that I worked as part of and it was just, it was fab fun actually.

Participant 15, Organisation A

I think it's hard to thrive at work when people around you are not. I think it's really hard. It wrecks the equilibrium in a team.

Participant 1, Organisation B

Those around me were giving off the same sort of vibes, so that they felt that they were also being stretched and working towards the same sort of thing and getting the same sort of satisfaction.

Participant 5, Organisation B

The people around you really help you thrive and when you know that they can help you that you can help them as well so again feeling like you can make a difference not just to the wider world but also to the people who are immediate, to your immediate colleagues.

Participant 9, Organisation B

In this case it was probably more the people, just because of the sort of the approach they took as a team was really good, open and inviting I would say.

Participant 11, Organisation B

There was a feeling of enthusiasm, you know, the team were enthused, we were working well as a unit; that would make me feel I was thriving at work.

Participant 12, Organisation B

I think there are periods where, I'm not saying you have to be best friends, but where there is definitely a sense of team and the team is feeling like its doing a good, its doing well and doing the right thing and is being really challenged but actually as a team you feel like you're tackling that job.

Participant 12, Organisation B

The unit of delivery is the team, and it was the closest I think I've got to in terms of a perfectly working team. As a whole it worked perfectly, nothing got dropped, everyone knew how everyone else worked and everyone just kind of accommodated other people's work.

Participant 15, Organisation B

It was home, not in a sort of an overtly romantic sense, but nonetheless maybe with a small 'r'.

Participant 15, Organisation B

Feeling trusted/Recognised by colleagues.

That's a sort of acceptance and people seeing that you're doing well that is important to me.

Participant 1, Organisation A

It's sort of the feeling that you're becoming an expert in something and so I think for me the pinnacle is for somebody to actively ask you for your opinion on something because they see you as an expert.

Participant 2, Organisation A

Then I also had some feedback from my team and the fact that they were recognising some of the things that I'd change, that was quite nice.

Participant 5, Organisation A

You need to be recognised for stretching yourself as well and putting in that extra effort, but what is nice is if it delivers something to the company and it gets recognised.

Participant 8, Organisation A

I like recognition for what I've done, it doesn't have to be financial recognition or anything like that but I like to know that I'm doing a good job, and it doesn't necessarily have to be a better job than somebody else but I just need to know that I'm progressing I guess.

Participant 10, Organisation A

I think the recognition thing is important and it helps your sense of thriving if you like and your sense of achievement. If you don't get the recognition that can have a negative effect on people, you know if you do something that you think was a real achievement and you don't get any recognition from people

just don't seem to nobody thinks it was that good really, you kind of, that's quite negative.

Participant 11, Organisation A

There's something in there about feeling that your different skills and experience are being utilised.

Participant 12, Organisation A

She's getting the right vibes from her peer group, the CEO and others that they value her, that she's making a contribution, do you know what I mean? I just sense she's in a place now, where she's thriving.

Participant 15, Organisation A

I think that knowing that people around you are appreciative of what you're doing, and that's not just from like senior people either, kind of, my position within the group.

Participant 1, Organisation B

People did appreciate it and I was only recently actually looking at all the things that people had said when I left and there were lots of nice words ... I read those and I think " yeah, that makes coming to work have a sense of value".

Participant 2, Organisation B

When I get that feedback it might be that someone is recognising that I do have a set of skills that are valuable to the situation and again it's that feeling of well any compliment is kind of nice, and people like to feel like they're bringing something kind of special that perhaps others don't have, so I find

that motivational as well as it just makes you feel kind of good about what you're doing.

Participant 6, Organisation B

Recognised, having people aware of it rather than "what do you do? Oh, we don't know anything about that", that would be "well why are you doing it then?"

Participant 7, Organisation B

I don't think it is possible to thrive without feedback, because actually no matter how well you think you're thriving, if you're affecting people around you in a possibly negative way then, I don't know, its whether you think you're thriving or other people think you're thriving and I think it would be very, very difficult for other people to assess you as someone who is thriving if actually you're kind of bull dozing everything you're part of.

Participant 10, Organisation B

So let's say I'm delivering everything, it's all fine, but people's reactions to my delivery of the work are actually quite say negative or damaging, then that would then make you feel, even though you've delivered what you said you would do, you would still feel a bit bad about the result. Yeah, yes so you wouldn't feel like that's a success.

Participant 11, Organisation B

I think truthfully there was probably some of just like others perceiving the work that I was doing as valuable and good and interesting and innovative and those kinds of things I think that probably had quite a bit to do with it.

Participant 12, Organisation B

Feeling trusted/Recognised by line manager.

I mean a bit of public recognition goes a long way I think sometimes.

Participant 2, Organisation A

The other parts of thriving is you need to feel valued by your leadership as well and you know although no matter how senior you get you obviously want a pat on the back every so often, so you know the odd word doesn't go amiss.

Participant 8, Organisation A

I got feedback from my manager as well about the difference they felt the group was making.

Participant 9, Organisation A

I like to be recognised for doing good work and not necessarily financially, I'm not too bothered about that.

Participant 10, Organisation A

In front of the whole group he talked about some work that I've done ... so that's quite nice to be praised in front of your peers, you know, that makes you feel good. Yes, so I'd say that's probably the main one.

Participant 1, Organisation B

Getting recognition of the fact that you've sorted it out is important. Each of us likes acknowledgement that you're doing the right thing so you're on the right track.

Participant 2, Organisation B

The principle one is the kind of feedback you're getting from your line manager. The kind of feedback you're getting from them is positive and supportive about the work that you're doing, and they are engaged in the work that you're doing as well ... you know you're not just wasting your time.

Participant 3, Organisation B

Yesterday I sent an email which at the time felt quite important and my boss responded to me saying "great email", which is a really small thing, but when someone tells you then that for example that gives me a boost and that suggests that I'm kind of doing the right thing. So, a combination of that ad hoc feedback and the structured feedback that I have with my line manager.

Participant 6, Organisation B

I would feel I was thriving if my manager or my boss thought I was doing a good job, probably gaining some good feedback that would make me feel I was doing a good job.

Participant 12, Organisation B

If someone's giving me good feedback and I've got a good rapport with my manager and I understand what they want of me and I know that I'm doing it, that makes me feel like I'm thriving. Having a really clear job description helps with that as well so I can kind of see what's expected of me, they get that, I get that and it's kind of working.

Participant 14, Organisation B

People would say things to me "You're doing really well, NAME OF BOSS is mentioning you a lot", and then I felt like really confident like I was thriving.

Participant 14, Organisation B

Feeling trusted/Line manager empowers/Shows trust in me.

I think it's control in the sense of empowerment, so you need to be empowered to do things, so if you're given a role, and given a remit and a budget ... somebody has to have that trust and faith in you, so if you've built that up.

Participant 8, Organisation A

There was a definite transfer of accountability to me to get it done ... so that they expressed confidence in me as an individual, not in the, I didn't know what the minutia was going to be like, but there was some confidence level and they let me get on and do it.

Participant 14, Organisation A

You were his expert; you were brought in to do the job.

Participant 15, Organisation A

She leaves a lot more decision making to me as well because she's got much more, not more confidence in my ability ... but less confidence in her own and kind of thinks that mine is probably in a better place.

Participant 1, Organisation B

That is really important because that is, that's someone saying, I trust you as an individual to deliver this thing that we really need; well that plays to your sense of worth, value and ability.

Participant 2, Organisation B

This was a time when people probably were given a bit more autonomy to have a go at things ... more faith in individuals to deliver, just to get on with things and to have the nuance and the ability, the all-round ability to deliver.

Participant 2, Organisation B

I'm thriving at work if my manager has confidence in me and my ability and just let me do it. I don't react well to being micro-managed whatever, that doesn't, I wouldn't thrive in a micro-management situation.

Participant 2, Organisation B

It's fine to go off and spend 10 days in CONTINENT and of course it's necessary and that felt great that was the sort of trust thing.

Participant 2, Organisation B

I guess ultimately, I must get a sense of value as being like a trusted, knowledgeable person on that chosen field, a policy that I was responsible for.

Participant 3, Organisation B

He just trusts them, he trusts them to okay, just get on with it.

Participant 3, Organisation B

Confidence right and he doesn't feel the need to be all over what you're doing all the time, he's like "No its fine. I'm just happy you guys are in a good place.", so he's clearly in that happy, comfortable position and he doesn't feel the need to check on it all the time and that feeds down, it kind of radiates.

Participant 3, Organisation B

Having great managers and trusting managers is really, really important.

Participant 10, Organisation B

I think she's got a huge amount of trust in what we do, what we produce and what we deliver and as a result, doesn't tend to get involved unless we ask.

Participant 10, Organisation B

Our manager will actually kind of delegate that sign off anyway and that's kind of quite a public show of trust which is really nice. Things like bringing us along to meetings to support them with our expertise ... and again shows that they trust us.

Participant 10, Organisation B

There's a security isn't there I think associated with that empowerment. I've come across people for example who can be quite anxious I guess at work about certain things and I've got no doubt in my mind that some of that anxiety is because of I guess a lack of trust.

Participant 10, Organisation B

Just giving me the independence to do and trusting me to just go off and like lead this area and sit outside the team and trusting that you know that I wanted to do that supporting me in that in that approach.

Participant 11, Organisation B

He was very trusting of me personally and I found that quite empowering and made me feel more confident about my abilities, I found that helped a lot.

Participant 12, Organisation B

It wasn't a question of telling me how to do it or what to do or any of that it was like, well you know you're really capable you can do these things.

Participant 12, Organisation B

There have been times where I've done really mundane and probably considered boring jobs but have thrived because of the reasons I was given to then, where I have had freedom to do it, I've been sort of trusted, empowered.

Participant 12, Organisation B

You start working with him and within a couple of weeks or so he kind of makes a judgement call as to whether he thought you were competent or not and if his thinking was you were, then he just kind of left you to it.

Participant 13, Organisation B

Trusting in colleagues/Competent colleagues.

I guess the other thing we spoke about having colleagues that you can openly speak with and what have you as well, I think I built up umm, a bigger group of people as well, I was if you like sort of co-opting people into that group, so that circle of people became bigger which helps as well and in different aspects so the people you know you wouldn't necessarily go out with outside of work but you knew you could rely upon them in a certain situation from different departments and things as well.

Participant 1, Organisation A

I learnt loads from them just by watching how they did things, what they're approach was to things, and I think it's you know, I think its if you're going to thrive you've got to have an open mind and you've got to be willing to see how other people do things and to take what learnings you can and you might not agree with everything that they do but there should be something you can take from them and go "oh actually that was really good."

Participant 2, Organisation A

I think if I'm interested to come to work then I'm definitely thriving and if I trust the people around me, then that tends to make me thrive at work.

Participant 4, Organisation A

I only know my part and I need people to do the other contributions and to own their own ... it helped everyone else in the room understand well NAMEs doing that, NAMEs doing this, and someone else is doing and it just helped to solidify the project.

Participant 6, Organisation A

The people I worked with were really good. I've worked with really good people, which really helped. Professional people, who like to work together as groups, teams, people who were, there wasn't really people who were very self.

Participant 7, Organisation A

I wouldn't come to work otherwise. For me the team's important, the leadership is very important, and then the leadership team you're a part of because you're interacting with them at a level where you're making key decisions and you don't have to be aligned but you have to debate in a professional way and I think that's important.

Participant 8, Organisation A

Yeah, I think umm, for me quite, it does have to be coming from people that I really respect in a professional capacity, so I guess there's a trust issue for me on their advice and support, I guess as well and ... for me at work about their competence.

Participant 10, Organisation B

I think the difference is everyone's really talented and really capable which means that I get to do the job that I think I'm supposed to be doing in this role, rather than the job of say my manager and the person below me and the people sideways, so it's, everyone is doing what they're supposed to be doing, which then enables me to do what I think, where I think I can add the most value.

Participant 11, Organisation B

I think they were all just really good at their jobs and really passionate about the agenda.

Participant 11, Organisation B

For me it is quite a big part of being able to thrive at work because you want that around you, you want people you can trust, rely on and maybe sometimes people you just know in that, you know their ability and their range and that sort of stuff, so they might not be the person who you know who just get everything done, because they're brilliant, but you know what they're capable of and therefore you can trust them to do the things that you know they're capable of.

Participant 12, Organisation B

I think a big part of it is the, is the competence of the team, so I'm thinking back to some of the teams that I worked with where that hasn't been the case and some of that is also an underlying we don't know how to do this, so it's hard but we don't know how to do this, whereas with the team at present, the nature of the problems we're facing are technical and procedural and we have a really good multi-disciplinary team that know how to do that.

Participant 13, Organisation B

Trusting in colleagues/Co-workers' support.

It's the support of the people around you ... some of it comes within you and a desire to want to do it and a desire to seek out the people who can help you but it's also about the support network around you I think.

Participant 2, Organisation A

You need the right support as well, you need to be able to know that you can get support if you need it, depending on what it is that you're working on.

Participant 7, Organisation A

I'm probably a bit more independent, I think it's one of those things, but I think it's still as important for probably everybody, to feel like you're supported.

Participant 11, Organisation A

I think that's useful not in terms of a safety net, but in terms of another resource to draw on in terms of advice essentially, so that's useful, having a contact network and that's something I do draw on in all aspects of my work is having a strong network, a strong personal network of people I know I can go to for advice on a myriad of different technical or staffing questions, so that's important because then I feel like I can explore and be challenged, not with that safety net in place but with resources to draw on for advice and support, so that was important.

Participant 13, Organisation A

If I hadn't had the colleagues' support or managerial support, for the end game ... I would have been annoyed.

Participant 14, Organisation A

Having support from others, so you know if I was working on, my work is quite separate to other people's work, but I talk about it and let people know what's going on.

Participant 4, Organisation B

Valued and recognised and believed I suppose, supported, liked I guess, accepted.

Participant 4, Organisation B

I felt as if we were a very tight knit family, almost like a family unit. It was quite emotive I think having people that had decided that they'll trust you with anything and everything from you know, personal issues to work issues and that they can come to you and that they know that it's a position of trust and sort of a set of principles and values that they're comfortable with.

Participant 8, Organisation B

Feeling like there's actually a great team of people around me ... I have somebody to go to and they will diffuse the problem or a safety net almost to fall back gives me a bit more courage to go try new things, to do new things and to you know go and try to pitch new ideas to people, get a bit creative, so knowing that that supportive environment is around me kind of helps me and will kind of help me grow as a person or in my career.

Participant 9, Organisation B

I'd put it down to maybe it's just luck, maybe it's a good collection of individuals meeting and clicking, so you don't actually need the whole team to love everybody on the team as long as there are 5 or 6 odd people who you

know, you actually connect with on a personal level and that they will understand any problems you might have either work life, personal life and that they actually support you and value you your achievements as much as you value them is quite important, so having that you know, being able share those experiences with them.

Participant 9, Organisation B

Going out for lunch randomly and just having a bit of a rant about what's happening in the office, or actually also knowing that they feel very free to have that rant with me and that they will share those same things, so it's a two way, that it's not just them constantly listening to me, but actually that people come to me and can trust me and feel like I'm giving them that same level of support that's really nice understanding to have, so a kind of two way street that you get.

Participant 9, Organisation B

I think having a really good support network at work is really important.

Participant 10, Organisation B

I think having a network at work, it's a huge mutual support network for us, and I think that encourages all of us to thrive.

Participant 10, Organisation B

For me it does have to be coming from people that I really respect in a professional capacity, so I guess there's a trust issue for me on their advice and support.

Participant 10, Organisation B

This was the other thing also that worked in the team, it's that thing about having one another's backs.

Participant 13, Organisation B

We worked really well together those were the kind of hallmarks of the working relationship that you always had one another's backs, so you never dropped anyone in it.

Participant 13, Organisation B

In terms of the office environment I think knowing that there are people that I can talk to if things get difficult or stressful and that I can express myself to properly ... and just generally a kind of welcoming environment, I guess.

Participant 14, Organisation B

What I like is, supportive, well networked organisations.

Participant 15, Organisation B

Trusting in colleagues/Line manager's support.

I actually don't thrive on being worried about what people think, I thrive on their advice and their support ... he's been a very, very supportive boss. I have a perception that in industry for no apparent reason people are suddenly (bangs table) wallop gone, and it happens with remarkable speed, and I do find that unsettling, so I don't really like to be unsettled.

Participant 3, Organisation A

Somebody needs to give you that latitude to hang yourself or succeed, but they need to know when to step in so it's having a good leader behind you that knows "Oh, I'd better direct her, she's steering off."

Participant 8, Organisation A

You felt that he was watching you're back if you like and I think that actually went up through the organisation.

Participant 9, Organisation A

The key thing is support. You feel that that person is really supporting you by stepping back but they're really on your side and if it happened to go wrong, they would be supporting you.

Participant 9, Organisation A

Well I said this to him I said, "What I want from a boss is hands off, know what I'm doing but hands off, but when I have an issue I go to you, I tell you what the issue is and you tell me exactly what I should be doing about it.", so he can say yes or no or what, I think that's really useful in a boss somebody who doesn't apply too much pressure, but is there when you need them.

Participant 10, Organisation A

They were very supportive but very hands off, and that's quite important for me as well I need to be supported but autonomous at the same time.

Participant 11, Organisation A

They were fundamentally very supportive, but just obviously not there, so that was useful because it gave me that space and that removal of immediacy of support to make it a challenge, a growing opportunity, but in the back of my mind was the knowledge that I do have a good support infrastructure behind me.

Participant 13, Organisation A

The times when I feel as though I've really made impact or really thrived has been with that mixture of support and grand challenge.

Participant 14, Organisation A

I'm quite happy where I am. I'm working for an outstanding person recently who is really supportive and encouraging and has given me space to do things and has been brilliant and really, it's been a fantastic experience.

Participant 3, Organisation B

He gives people loads of space just to get on and to make the programme their own; "make it your own, check with me, report back to me how it's going, we'll have a chat every now and then, but make it happen, make it happen an whatever you want to do I'll back you."

Participant 3, Organisation B

Senior leadership jump in out of nowhere, like just balls coming in from the left-hand side that you're not expecting. He's very, very, very, good at managing those and protecting us from that, which I find very beneficial.

Participant 4, Organisation B

There are so many things that exist in the civil service that actually could have a negative impact on thriving, because we're so worried about what the Daily Mail would say ... and there's also something about seeing people as a whole and what is important to individuals and not trying to pretend that we are different people in work.

Participant 4, Organisation B

Most importantly for me is that, they are there to talk to, to give feedback, to consult with, but they give you the freedom to just get on with the job.

Participant 6, Organisation B

I like being left to my own devices, but I also like at the same time I want to feel that they're interested and engaged. I think the part of their role is to get that balance between still engaging with me as a person on the team that they line manage and giving me the space and the autonomy to go away and do what it is I need to do.

Participant 8, Organisation B

She had a kind of personal approach, caring. When things went wrong, I knew she wouldn't freak out and go crazy and just completely break down on me.

Participant 9, Organisation B

Because when you think about a good manager you would say he gives you support, gives you cover, gives you the freedom.

Participant 11, Organisation B

I guess there was a fair bit of air cover as they call it, so he was doing some of that like outward sort of battles on behalf of our team.

Participant 12, Organisation B

You need a safe environment in which to take risks (laughter). I know, but in terms of feeling like you're covered if something goes wrong, they've got your back.

Participant 12, Organisation B

Along with giving a lot of autonomy, one of the things NAME used to do was only ever berate you or disagree with you in private, so having given you all that freedom, if you then made a judgement call that didn't quite pan out, he would always kind of go "Well you know you had to make a call, you made a call, I would have done it this way or actually there was no way of knowing and making a decision is better than doing nothing."

Participant 13, Organisation B

We worked really well together those were the kind of hallmarks of the working relationship that you always had one another's backs, so you never dropped anyone in it, if there was a mistake, just immediately the more senior person would take the hit.

Participant 13, Organisation B

It's that uncertainty that I don't like and then not having someone have your back either, so I don't want to be micro-managed, but I do want to know someone is there if I need them.

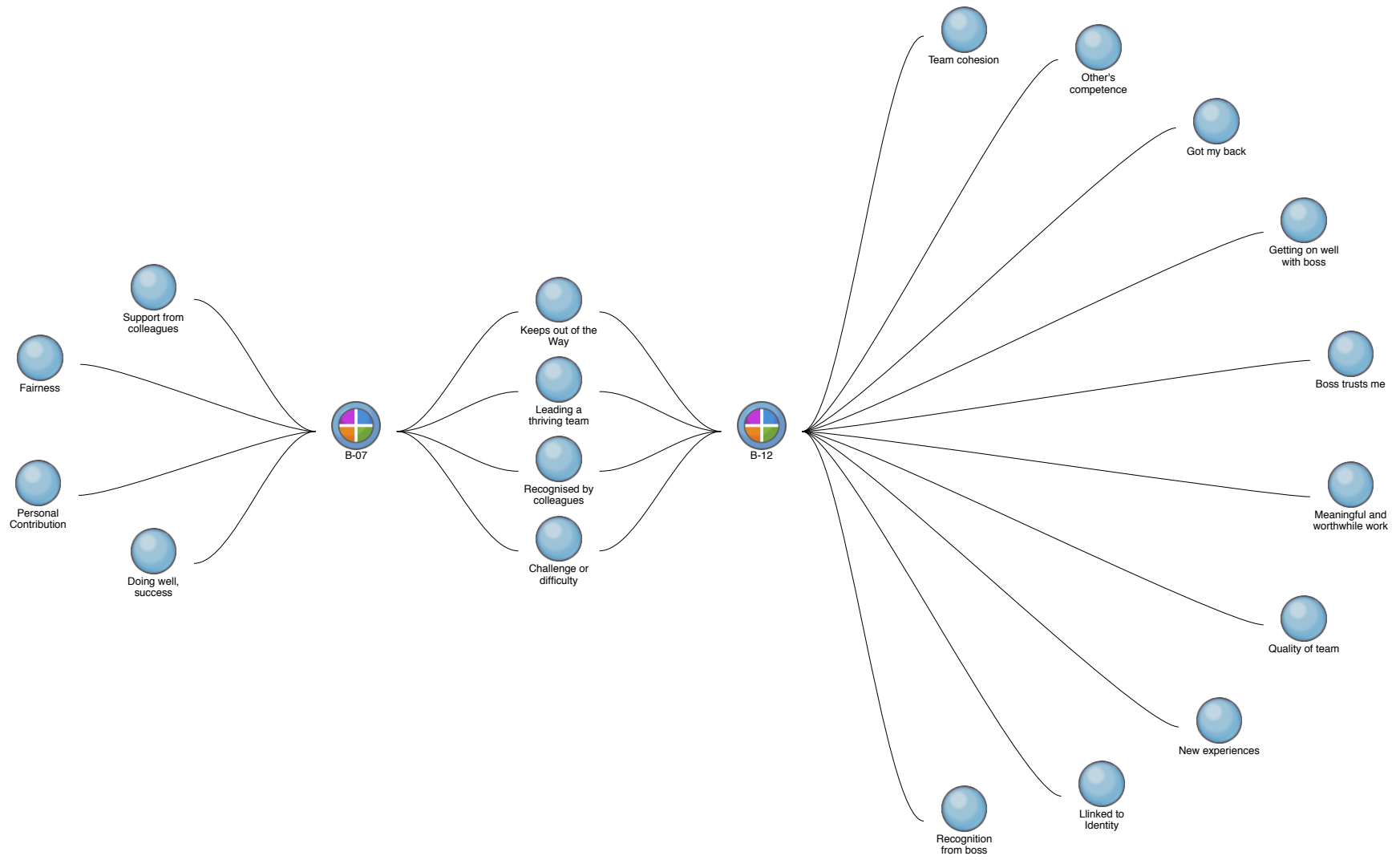
Participant 14, Organisation B

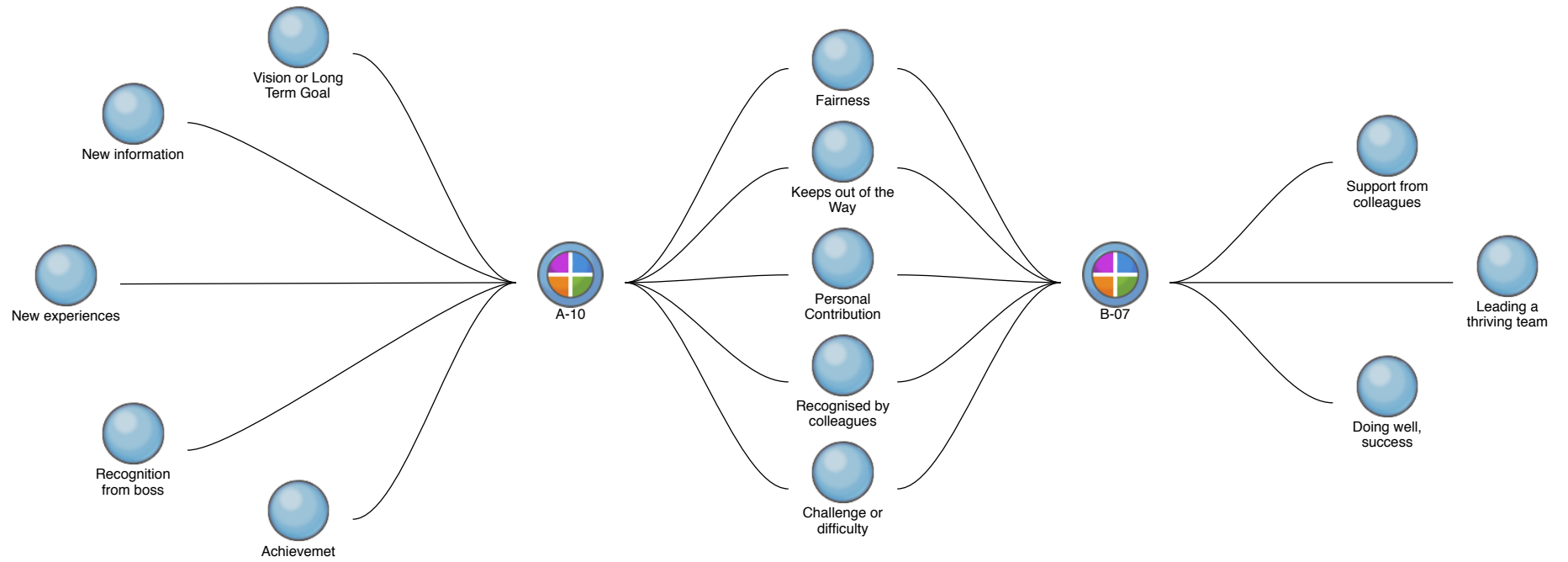
To say "I've got your back", it's a tremendous amount of pressure off.

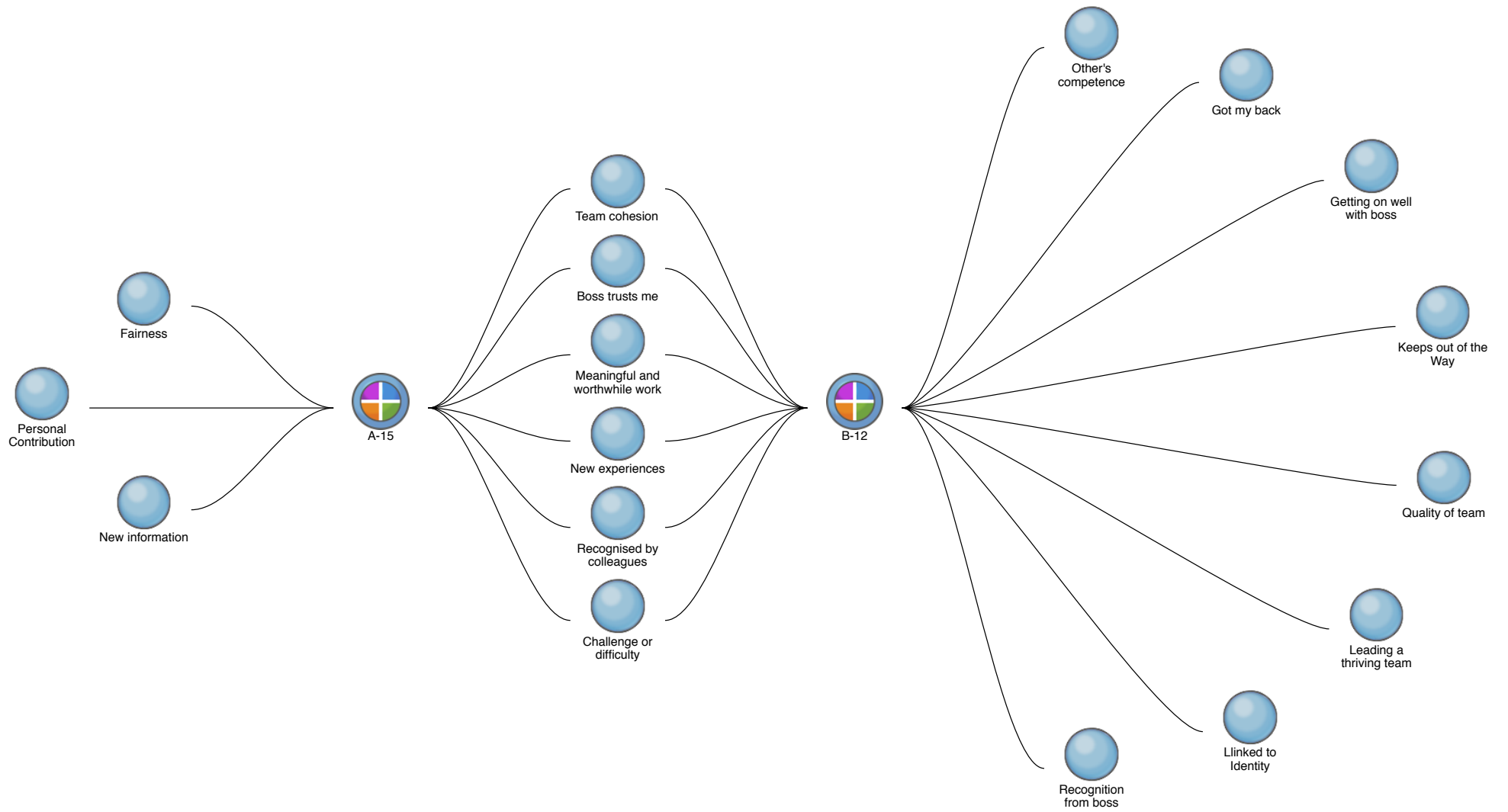
Participant 15, Organisation B

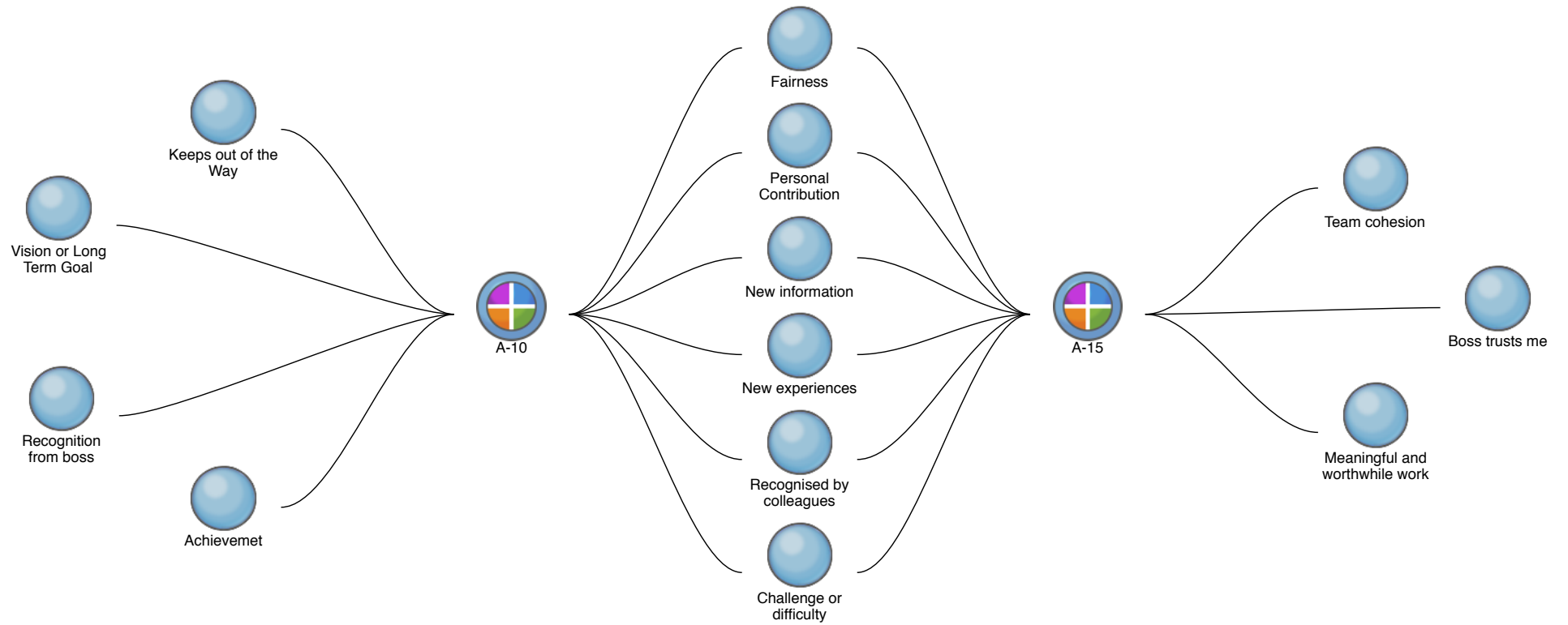
Appendix H: Comparisons of Participants' Responses

Each comparison chart shows the coding nodes that the two participants share in between the two, and the ones that they don't share on either side. In this first example two participants from Organisation B are compared. Across the themes of mutual trust and making a difference their responses from both participants have been coded to 4 nodes. However there are a further 4 nodes that were used to code the responses from Participant 7, but not from Participant 12. Conversely there were 10 nodes that were used to code the responses from Participant 12 and not from Participant 7. In the next two comparison charts participants were randomly chosen from the two organisations to compare. If participants responses were consistently coded in the same way the comparison charts would have more nodes between the two participants and less on each side.









Appendix I: The Reflexive Journey from the Perspective of the Researcher

My initial interest in thriving at work stems from a belief that work can be an enriching, positive experience for people but often isn't experienced that way and isn't portrayed that way. Work is often seen as a means to an end rather than having a value in its own right. This is despite the overwhelming evidence that not working is bad for you. I did not have a formal or concrete definition of thriving when I first started exploring it as a way of thinking about the good experiences of work, but I did know that it seemed to capture more than just enjoying something or doing well at it. It reflected something about being enriched and somehow better off as a result of working (but not from a material perspective). If I had been asked to describe what I thought of when I imagined someone thriving at work, I would have described someone who is really confident and enthusiastic about their work, passionate about it and excited to do it. They wouldn't see it as a chore, even though they probably did need to work, this wasn't their main motivation. When someone is thriving, they somehow grow in their stature and presence – they are where they want to be, doing what they want to do.

My other main interest was leadership as I have extensive experience working with leaders and believe that their experience of their work has a significant impact on those that work for them and around them. If they are thriving, they create a very different atmosphere than if they are not.

As I started to explore the literature on thriving at work, I quickly came across Spreitzer's work and initially was excited that there was a body of literature, and a measure of thriving at work that I could build upon. My focus was on a study to

exploring an aspect of the relationship between thriving at work and leadership within the quantitative methodology. However as I began to explore the literature more deeply, I realised there was a fundamental challenge with this approach. I found it very hard to create a strong argument for the validity of the concept that was suited to this more positivistic approach. The data was not yet comprehensive enough to be able to do this. Secondly the rationale for the dominant definition of thriving at work that supported the measure that would inform a quantitative approach did not seem to be based on an understanding of how individuals experienced it, but rather defined it and then connected this definition to strong existing theories such as self-determination theory. As I began to read more, I made a connection to the broader literature in positive psychology and formed a view that this was a pattern that could be seen across other constructs such as wellbeing and flourishing. In this context the literature that was more critical of this field resonated and captured the unhelpful implications of a desire for credibility that created a bias towards the positivist paradigm and the scientific method.

This led me to an exploration of a more fundamental question: is thriving at work a specific construct that people experience and is different to others, and, if so, what is that experience and what allows it to happen? These were formulated into a set of objectives that were then shaped by a more systematic literature review.

This literature review generated greater enthusiasm for the direction that my research was moving towards. There were a number of interesting questions that arose from the research, as well as a sense that there was something worth exploring. At this point it was important to keep checking in on my assumption that

thriving at work was a unique construct, that it was inherently positive, and that people would be able to identify with it and describe it.

The decision to focus on managers was taken early on and was driven in part by my interest in people at work who have this additional capacity to influence others, but also by a desire to focus on a particular working group. My assumption was that thriving at work may be different for different types of workers and work and that trying to capture the more generalised experience different work groups may be less valuable. They were also, perhaps surprisingly, a group that had received little attention in the extant literature. After careful consideration I chose managers as a group for whom there is a clear criteria – they supervise others.

The choice of methodology was driven by these reflections, rather than an assumption from the beginning. I experimented with ideas that were quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. Having decided to really try and understand how managers experienced thriving at work the choice of the social constructivist paradigm, a qualitative methodology and the specific methods chosen was seemed natural and my reflexivity at this stage in the research focused on ensuring that I was making the right choices for the right reasons and had considered other options. As an example the selection of semi-structured interviews over focus groups. In designing the detail of the recruitment and enrolment of participants I was very aware of the need to think and communicate as a researcher, rather than an HR professional or consultant (which is my normal role). This involved considering how the process might be experienced by a potential participant, the concerns they may have about being involved and what they would want to know about the research

process. Occasionally I found myself falling into the trap of selling the opportunity or phrasing information in organisation-speak. The work that went into gaining ethical approval was very helpful in this and I found it a very useful part of the research process.

Apart from the assumptions already mentioned I honestly believe I went into the interviews with an open mind. The interviews were based on the assumption that participants would be able to describe what it felt like to thrive at work and an experience in detail. I did run a couple of mock interviews before beginning the research that suggested this was the case, but I was prepared for the eventuality that they may not be able to do it. In hindsight this was unlikely as participants self-selected knowing what the interview was about so were likely to have a point of view on thriving at work. Once interviews began it required a discipline not to engage too much in the discussion. I was aware that I might get interested in a particular aspect mentioned by a participant and this would drive the questioning, rather than creating the space for the participant to talk about the things that mattered most to them. An example of this was the theme of the upward spiral. Early on I started to form a view that this may be a characteristic of thriving at work and it would have been very easy to latch on to a comment that supported this hypothesis and ask them to expand. I tried not to do this beyond perhaps one probing question, recording my hypothesis in my reflexive journal and then trying to put it to one side until the analysis. The interview guide was also helpful in this as it created a structure that kept the interview from getting too stuck in a particular area.

A further focus of my reflexivity at this time was on attuning my interview style to the position of the participant. Across the interviews I interviewed participants who were currently thriving at work, others who were quite happy but did not consider themselves to be thriving and others who were deeply disaffected and unhappy at work currently. As a result it was important to recognise the current context for the discussion, particularly if it was negative for the participant, and attune my responses. This did not change the basic structure of the interview, but influenced my body language, tone and sometimes the positioning of a question. For example, when asking for an example of thriving it was important to recognise if someone was clearly not thriving currently in order to create the empathy required for an effective interview. I noticed a distinction in these particular interviews between empathy (which was helpful to the process) and sympathy (which would have created a different conversation focused on the things that are currently wrong). In reality those participants who were unhappy in their current role were more likely to describe not thriving and I quickly realised that these experiences needed to be coded so that descriptions could inform the analysis.

Transcribing the interviews was a very useful exercise in terms of reflexivity as it brought the interviews back to life and enabled a further level of processing at the level of raw data before coding began. I became more aware of some of the hypotheses that I had started to form, and some were reinforced (the upwards spiral) whereas others were not. I had early on formed a view that values were an important part of thriving based on some comments made in a couple of early interviews, but actually this did not come out when I listened back to them. Hearing the voices again reminded me that the group was actually very diverse in terms of

personalities and approaches to the interviews, and in different states of mind. This individuality was a theme in itself that I wanted to keep an eye on as I began the analysis. It was also useful that it combatted the recency effect. I transcribed all the interviews once I had finished the process and did them in a random order to try to ensure my thinking wasn't being overly influenced by the later interviews.

At this stage I was very focused on answering the questions raised by the literature review which influenced how I initially viewed the data. This was not so much at the individual level of codes as I was very generative in how I approached this – and had a lot of codes to begin with as a result, but more how I organised them. Initially this led to a very descriptive analysis that was based around themes that organised content. I realised at this stage that I was working too hard to answer questions (who does it feel, what are the factors, how does it relate to thriving outside work?), rather than to represent the participants' reality. Throughout the research I was aware of my positivistic tendencies and this was a place where I had to keep them in check. The inclination towards numbers, direct comparisons was there but I found it was very helpful to keep going back to the transcripts and the recordings to balance this. I also found myself developing a deeper understanding of the constructivist paradigm and how it differed philosophically from others. This realisation helped me to approach the data in a different way and freed me up to allow the integrative themes to emerge. I found N-Vivo very helpful as you could switch between looking at how the data might be organised and each participants' transcript with ease.

The last two chapters of the thesis capture my interpretation of the analysis and I noticed that at this stage my perspective became more explicit as the discussion

moved from a comparison of this analysis to the findings in the extant literature to a perspective that moved understanding forward. It therefore became necessary to be more critical of my perspective in order to check I wasn't creating a story that fitted with my point of view. Assumptions such as the value of considering thriving at work as a distinct construct were challenged and the assumptions on which the extant literature were challenged

Overall my reflexive journey was informed by my values. I felt a significant responsibility to respect and represent the perspectives offered by the participants and believe this helped me to stay curious and open-minded. Conversely, this set of values also caused me to be challenged by the need for criticality of my own choices and thinking and the extant literature. It took some time for me to realise I was equating criticality in thinking with being critical of others or negative in my thinking. Once I had separated the two, I was able to more clearly see where this research could add value and articulate that. Finally I noticed my natural inclination towards the pragmatic came to the fore as I came towards the analysis and discussion. This was noticed throughout my reflections and tempered to allow me to consider the theoretical implications and the need for more research, rather than jumping straight to practical solutions.

Emma Judge

August 2019

Appendix J: An Excerpt from the N-Vivo Transcript of Coding Decisions

April 5th

Captured two types of learning under personal growth and called them new experiences and new information to distinguish between the novelty aspect (i.e. not bored or stuck) vs the specifically wanting to learn something quite targeted. Allows for overall focus on learning though...

Also took out physical manifestations - only 2 items and were to do with confidence and happiness (just expressed through body language).

Cleaned up happiness (emotional state of wellbeing) vs enjoyment and enthusiasm about the work vs energy (physical state).

Need to work through doing well and also identify when learning is an indicator of thriving vs an element of it.

Created new node for coding of answer to question "how do you know you are thriving" vs the indicators of thriving - clearer for analysis to have the codes that capture response to a question separate to the answers otherwise duplicates. Have done this for others thriving, example of thriving too. Then create sub nodes so all in one place.

Also had coded example of thriving twice at parent node and then again at current/recent/past. Took out parent node coding and made it an aggregate.

April 7th

Sorted out classification of demographic attributes - added two new options for time in organisation and time in role to categorise by less than 2, 2-5, 6-10, 11-20, 21 to 40.

April 9th

Tidied up how often evaluate thriving - either daily or less often.

References to different for different individuals were captured under individual mindset - more useful.

Reviewed Boss Thriving - not really a specific theme - mainly about the confidence of the boss or the ability to support which are captured elsewhere. Deleted.