Research Paper

The Role of Flourishing in Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Flourishing is a relatively new concept in the field of Positive Psychology focusing on positive mental health and the life well lived. It is a comprehensive form of mental health encompassing emotional, psychological and social well-being. The present paper attempts to examine how concept of human flourishing works at the very core of a productive and thriving workplace. The aim is also to understand the pathway of fostering flourishing in organizations so that goals of sustainable development can be achieved. The paper first explains the various theoretical models that describe the components of flourishing. This was followed by a discussion of different challenges to organizations posed by Covid-19 Pandemic, social isolation, remote working conditions and the phenomenon of the Great resignation. The consequences of these challenges result in various mental health issues among the current workforce in India and all over the world. The paper also describes strategic interventions that can be used to promote flourishing in organizations that are in the form of Psychological Capital, Character Strengths, Job Crafting etc.

Keywords: *Flourishing at workplace, Pandemic, The Great resignation, Job Crafting, Character strengths*

Human flourishing is a concept that is at the very core of the sustainable development. If the flourishing among individuals and communities are high, it can help in attaining a number of sustainable development goals, specifically the goal number three that targets for the well-being of all. The proactive approach of flourishing ensures conditions that help all human beings to fulfil their highest potential in dignity, equality and in a healthy environment (**McNeely, 2022).**

The concept of sustainable development tries to find a balance between economic growth, social equity and environmental outcome. The similar approach can also be implemented in modern businesses and organizations. In the present times, work is no more considered as a necessity in fact it provides a sense of identity, meaning and belongingness to an individual (**Burke et.al, 2015).** Thus, the need of the hour is to focus on developing flourishing organizations by assimilating factors such as hope, gratitude, character, virtue, strengths, close social relationships among employees within the workplace.

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The underlying assumption of the present article is that flourishing among workforce can lead to flourishing organizations. The aim is to combine ecological regeneration with human wellbeing creation **(Shrivastava and Zsolnai, 2022).** The contention is that if an organization is well-being oriented it will become genuinely responsive to the need of all stakeholders **(Shrivastava and Zsolnai, 2022).**

The present era is considered as a transition era leading towards fourth industrial revolution signified by artificial intelligence, blockchain and other breakthrough technologies. The constantly evolving technologies, market competition and new consumption patterns are changing the organizational dynamics in a significant way. Amid all these disruptive changes the research on employee well-being has been static and still focused on the traditional approaches of resolving the issues of stress, burnout and other mental health issues by employing traditional therapeutic methods. Declining mental health among individuals in demanding workplaces has been a cause of worry and the methods to address these issues are reactive and outdated.

Thus, the modern psychological literature on well-being emphasise on the need to adopt a more proactive approach towards mental health. The traditional approach waits for the deterioration of the well-being and then find quick-fixes. While the modern approach advocates for the promotion of practices that leads to comprehensive well-being among employees in the first place. As mentioned earlier, research on flourishing is a leading path towards comprehensive well-being. The approach is to find whether people in organization are flourishing or languishing. It investigates factors in the workplace that can be effective in promoting flourishing and also identifying factors that are cause of languishing. By identifying these factors personal flourishing can be encouraged among employees and managers can successfully develop workplaces as positive places that help employees to fully develop their potential.

Conceptualization of Flourishing: Recent Trends
The late 90's saw the birth of Positive Psychology movement, a new branch of Psychology that exclusively focuses on factors such as strengths, virtues and talents that enable positive mental health. Flourishing in simplest terms is a comprehensive form of well-being which goes beyond resolving the issues of depression and stress. Instead flourishing enhances positive mental health at the workplace, it includes identifying factors that would create a positive workplace environment.

Flourishing has been defined in various ways by different psychologists.
Keyes and Frederickson (2002) first explained the concept of flourishing and were of the opinion that mental health does not imply an absence of mental illness. Rather, mental health is a "separate dimension of positive feelings and functioning." **Keyes (2002)** further explained that flourishing is a state which comprises of high levels of both hedonic and eudemonic well-being".

Fredrickson and Losada (2005), defined flourishing as living within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience.

Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand defines, "flourishing as a state where people experience positive emotions, positive psychological functioning and positive social functioning, most of the time".

In more philosophical terms this means access to the pleasant life, the engaged or good life. It also refers to the development of attributes at social and personal levels that exhibit character strengths and virtues that are commonly agreed across different cultures (**Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson, 2005**).

There are some major conceptualizations of flourishing in the form of theories and models based on available research literature that are described below-

Keyes' Model of Flourishing: A Complete Mental Health (2002)
The Two Continua Model of mental health posited that complete mental health refers to optimal functioning as the combination of three types of well-being which are Emotional, Social and Psychological well-being. Keyes further explained that "mental health lies on a continuum ranging from flourishing (i.e., positive mental health) and languishing (i.e., negative mental health)". He further stated that "one can flourish or languish with or without a mental illness" and those who are neither flourishers nor languishers are considered to be in moderate mental health.

Fredrickson's Broaden and Build Model of Positive Emotions (2004)- This model posited that pleasant affective state acts as a critical ingredient of human flourishing. Frederickson emphasized that positive emotions have "undoing potential" and found "a magic ratio of 2.9 to 1 within positive to negative emotional experiences" with respect to human flourishing. The underlying core of the theory states that positive emotions do not just create a momentary feel-good experience. In fact, the theory discovered the broadening and building effects of positive emotions such as joy and contentment.

It means that experience of positive emotions broadens the range of thought-action repertoire and generates wider happiness and creativity at work. The presence of positive emotions at workplace increases the scope of individual action and functioning and spread throughout the work team and family (**Frederickson, 2003**).

Seligman's PERMA Model (2011): Seligman proposed that in Psychology, earlier the focus on studying human functioning was primarily disease oriented which rather produced adverse effect on the psyche of persons. He further described that as human distress is authentic so is human excellence, which appears to be essential for better living. People are not just distressed but they are also motivated to nurture "the best version of themselves" and want to lead a purposeful and meaningful life.

Seligman defined "flourishing as a construct that makes life fulfilling and investing more time dedicated to activities that yield well-being". He proposed PERMA model of flourishing which emphasizes upon the five core elements of happiness and well-being which basically stands for "positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishments" respectively.

Diener Theory of Flourishing (Diener, 2010) -Diener described flourishing in terms of "subjective wellbeing", which generally comprises of "positive affect and general life satisfaction". It is devoid of negative affect whereas happiness is defined in terms of both hedonic (emphasizes upon pleasures derived through the gratification of sense organs, relatively transitory) and eudemonic (derived after actualizing one's potential, relatively ephemeral) perspectives. Eudaimonia primarily consists of four levels of happiness such as first level relates to physical immediate gratification, level two refers to one's passion, whereas third level emphasizes upon purpose while fourth level refers to "ultimate good".

Diener theory includes the following components in flourishing which are positive relationships, engagement, meaning and purpose in life, competence, self-esteem, self-acceptance, optimism and social contribution.

Vanderweele theory of Flourishing (2017)
Vanderweele described flourishing in terms of five domains which are happiness and life satisfaction, Mental as well as physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue and close relationships. Unlike the earlier model of flourishing, Vanderweele (2017) found that financial and material stability also act as a determinant that sustain flourishing for a long period of time.

Vanderveele (2017) also described five pathways to flourishing in his model which are family**,** education, social relationships and religious community and also work. Thus, according to him, work can be a pathway to flourishing. This supports the underlying assumption that workplaces in organizations and business can become the effective platforms for fostering flourishing.

Thus, after going through all the conceptual frameworks of flourishing, it can be concluded that flourishing is a multi-dimensional and holistic concept and it goes beyond physical and mental health. It is a comprehensive measure of well-being comprising different facets of human life. However, despite the importance of flourishing to human endeavour, public policy to improve the human condition is often restricted to addressing deficits. Thus there is a need to further explore this phenomena in various contexts.

Flourishing in context of Organizations
Organizations play a critical role in shaping our world, influencing our communities, and providing opportunities for growth and prosperity. Therefore, it is essential that the focus of organizations must not be only on surviving but on thriving. However, in order to thrive first what is required is to know what exactly is a flourishing organization and what is required for an organization to flourish?

Zarrou, (2023) describes a flourishing organization as one that does not just fulfil their organizational objectives but also creates a positive impact on its stakeholders. Thus, it focuses on promoting well-being of a wider community comprising employees, customers, as well as its shareholders. A flourishing organization is one which have a clear purpose, a positive culture, and a drive for innovation and growth both personal and professional.

A look at the timeline of the history of organizational behaviour studies shows how the field has changed in the last few decades. The Scientific management approach by Taylor described organizations as closed systems whose only focus was to increase productivity. The scientific management approach assumed that employees working in organizations were motivated only by the economic gains. However, in contravention to it, Mayo presented the human relations theory and investigated the role of human emotions and feelings in context of organisations.

The human relations theory and the several experiments accompanying it, proved organizations as social systems where people working in it are not just governed by economic needs but also by social needs. It described organizations as complex systems which are not static or objective or formed a result of a pre-given reality but are constructed by social interactions of people **(Jakubik, 2017).**

Therefore, for organizations to flourish it is very important that individuals working in it also experience flourishing. Work provides a number of tangible benefits such as wages and financial security as well as intangible benefits. Good jobs foster learning and mastery, self-efficacy and autonomy, meaning, purpose and satisfaction, a sense of belonging, inclusion and social support **(McNeely, 2022).** A flourishing organization is one which nurtures these human needs in workplaces itself and where the employees experience a sense of psychological safety, trust, recognition, care and are treated with fairness and equity **(McNeely, 2022).**

Challenges to Flourishing in Organizations
With the advent of Covid outbreak and the subsequent lockdown in the different countries around the world, many challenges emerged for the organizations. Recently in 2023 in a survey titled Mental Health and Wellness Quotient at Workplace**,** it was reported that more than forty eight percent of corporate employees are struggling with mental health issues with women being more prone at risk compared to men.

Similarly, another survey conducted by **Delloite** in **2022** found that poor mental health among workforce cost billions of dollars of revenue loss to Indian employers. It also stated that majority which is eighty percent of the Indian workforce have reported mental health issues in the last few years. Among these, half of them mentioned workplace stress as the biggest reason, while social stigma is preventing thirty seven percent of employees to seek help for their condition.

The Covid-19 pandemic have further exacerbated the symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety especially among youth **(Al-Jubari et.al 2020)**. Some of the causes contributing to increased tension are unemployment which is causing loss of income, sickness, social isolation, death of a family member due to the virus, the uncertainty of future, helplessness, and lack of control over things **(Al-Jubari et.al 2020).**

The subsequent lockdowns after the pandemic forced employees to work from home. Now initially the remote work model had advantages of freedom of doing work from the comfort of home. However, it resulted in blurring of two domains of life and significantly altered work-life balance **(Carnevale and Hatak, 2020).** The work from home triggered seclusion, lack of contact with peers, disruption in family life and it resulted in increased risk of depression, anxiety and sleep disorders **(Carnevale and Hatak, 2020).** The pandemic also contributed in diminishing the multidimensional well-being of employee that is, psychological, emotional, economical, and social well-being.

Another challenge in front of the corporate world came with the emergence of the 'Great Resignation' phenomena in United States where it was reported that more than 4.5 million workers left their jobs **(McNeely, 2022).** The cause for this phenomenon is that in the post pandemic era, burnout is all the time high among employees of all age groups due to increased workloads and extended working weeks **(Parker and Horowitz, 2022).** Other causes cited for the great resignation was low pay, lack of opportunities for advancement, lack of meaning from work and the feeling of being disrespected at work **(Parker and Horowitz, 2022).**

Thus, the Great resignation in which employees are leaving the workforce in unprecedented numbers can serve as a warning for management to consider carefully the impact of work on individuals and the entire work community.

In India and the world over, another wave of change is coming in the form of rising startups and the rising unicorn companies. Thus, a new trend in the corporate world is the rising breed of young entrepreneurs who are starting new and creative ventures. This line of work has its own challenges. According to a study conducted by NIMHANS, around fifty percent of the entrepreneurs in India are experiencing some form of mental health issue **(Singh, 2023).** The study revealed that entrepreneurs in India are at higher risk of developing depression, anxiety, bipolar or other mental health disorders due to factors such as financial insecurity, long working hours and social isolation **(Singh, 2023).**

Similarly, a study at UC Berkeley found in the self-reported mental health concerns that entrepreneurs are significantly more likely to report cases of depression, ADHD, substance use conditions and bipolar diagnosis. In order to cope with the extreme demands at work many startup founders in India are replacing the regular coffees with a powerful stimulant od psychedelic drugs like LSD and psilocybin **(Gera, 2016).** The drugs act as hallucinogenic job enhancer, micro dose of such drugs creates mild euphoria and improve cognitive functioning as well as causes emotional balance and increasing physical stamina **(Gera, 2016).** This causes a warning sign that staple use of such drugs will result in drug overdose and long-term substance abuse. It will further diminish the well-being of entrepreneurs and pose huge challenges for other stakeholders of the Silicon Valley.

Other challenges are specific to the well-being of employees in the organizations. These are toxic workplace behaviours, technology overload, office politics, confusing job description, and failure on the part of managers to acknowledge the problems of employees **(Cartwright, 2017).**

Thus, in the post pandemic times when employees are returning to their workplaces, there is need on the part of the organizations to focus on well-being-oriented policies. For instance, currently organizations are promoting hybrid work cultures where employees are given freedom to come only few days to office in order to transition them smoothly at workplace. Thus, the need of the hour is to work for creating flourishing organizations. In order to create flourishing among organizations, there is a need to explore interventions that are proved effective by existing research evidence. These interventions have been explained in the next part of the chapter-

Interventions to Promote Flourishing among Organizations
The interventions and strategies to promote flourishing can be divided into two categories. One category focuses on developing personal resources at an individual level and the other are interventions that can be introduced at workplace to foster positive experiences.

Developing Psychological Capital -
Development of Psychological capital (PsyCap) among employees contribute in higher flourishing. Psychological capital is a form of personal resource that comprises four major factors such as hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism. People who are high on this attribute tend to pursue meaningful goals and are found to be more confident about their abilities **(Ho and Chan, 2022).** Developing psychological capital help employees to overcome setbacks and adversities and approach work challenges with a positive frame of mind **(Luthans, 2017).**

According to **Luthans (2017),** Psychological capital is a malleable psychological resource which can be developed through a number of positive psychology interventions. For

instance, **Salanova and Ortega-Maldonada (2019)** explained detailed strategies for the inculcation of the four dimensions of the psychological capital.

Hope can be developed through two powerful cognitive strategies termed as will-power and way-power. Through using smart goals strategy where goals are redefined and are made time bound help in development of will-power. While way-power is encouraged through training employees to follow approach orientations towards obstacles rather than avoidance orientation.

The second factor of optimism can be encouraged by training employees in positive expectancy **(Seligman, 2011).** The strategy train individuals to accept their past, appreciate their present and to be confident about the future. It also includes positive self-talk training and following the ABCDE model proposed by **Seligman (2011**). Visualization of positive outcomes, positive feedback, group interventions, and modelling are other training exercises to develop self-efficacy.

Another significant dimension of psychological capital is resilience in the times of crisis. The interventions used for encouraging resilience train individuals to first gain an objective perception of the crisis situation. The objective perception includes identifying asset factors that what are the resources available as well as risk factors. Through enhancing the asset factors and personal resources and diminishing the stressors, the adversities can be coped well. Through repetitive following the process resilience can be nurtured.

Another way to enhance personal resources is the use of cognitive exercises. It comprises practicing of gratitude, savouring and imagining one's best possible self **(Vanderweele, 2020).**

Practicing Gratitude-
Gratitude is not a unique invention of positive psychology research. Gratitude has been treated as a virtue in many religions of the world. With the emergence of the positive psychology movement, gratitude became an acceptable well researched topic and its positive association with high psychological well-being was well established.

There have been multiple easy interventions that can be employed to practice gratitude and flourishing. **Emmons and McCullough (2003)** introduced a technique called gratitude journaling, where an individual is trained to write down five things, they are grateful about every day. The practice help people to recognise the positives of their life and enhances well-being. Another effective intervention is "gratitude visit" in which employees are instructed to write thankyou notes or letters to those significant people in their lives who have helped them in any way in their lives. Performing random acts of kindness also help in inculcation of gratitude among employees.

Learning the Art of Savoring
Another intervention to enhance flourishing is savoring which means recognizing good in almost every aspect of life. **Bryant and Veroff (2007)** defined savoring as, "the capacity of individuals to attend, appreciate and enhance the positive experiences of one's life". Savoring is a form of an intervention where an individual is instructed to focus on positive experience of their life and to intentionally engage in positive thoughts and behaviours (**Bryant, 2003).**

Research studies report that practicing savoring is associated with high psychological well-being, life satisfaction and positive affect. There are a number of strategies at both organizational and at individual level that are found to be effective in inculcating the habit of savoring positive experiences of life. These strategies are sharing positive experiences with others, building specific memories of positive life events, self-congratulation, and the technique of counting one's blessings and kill-joy thinking.

While in organizations savouring can be encouraged by appreciating and celebrating small achievements of employees. One effective intervention is sensory-perceptual sharpening which involves focusing on specific details of a positive experience and the associated positive emotions and blocking out the distractions. Another exercise is to train employees to imagine thier best possible self where they are asked to imagine what would they like to be in their future self and imagining what according to them is the best state that they strive to achieve. All these activities have been found to promote well-being among employees **(Vanderweele, 2020).**

Providing Social support at Workplace-
Social support at work is another ingredient of flourishing. **Ho and Chan (2022)** did a study on working adults in Hongkong and found that high perceived organizational support act as a mediator and help in contribution of flourishing**. Hordjik (2022)** found that parental support and peer support are significantly associated with flourishing. **A'yuninnisa, Carminati and Wilderom, (2023)** found in their systematic review of flourishing studies that perceived social support from family act as an indirect predictor of job flourishing.

Similarly, **Abid et.al (2020)** found in their study on different workplaces that organizations can create the psychological state of well-being of employees encouraging positive organizational support. Thus, organizations can inculcate support by creating policies that are just and equitable. Support in the form of providing resources at work such as flexible hours for young mothers or employees who have family members suffering from serious medical conditions can go a long way to promote positive well-being among employees.

Identification and encouragement of the use of Character Strengths –
Character strengths refers to a group of positively valued traits, a set of qualities that enable individuals (and their communities) to thrive and play instrumental role in achieving optimal psychological functioning or flourishing **(Wagner, Pindeus and Ruch, 2021)**. There are a total of 24-character strengths and various measures that are available through which employees can identify their specific strengths. It has been found through different studies that character strengths such as zest and perseverance results in positive work outcomes such as satisfaction at work **(Peterson et al, 2009).**

Huber et.al (2020) found through their studies that applicability of a specific strength of judgment at work contributes to work-related outcomes, such as higher levels of work engagement and lower levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. **Wagner, Pindeus and Ruch (2021)** investigated character strengths and their role in the domain of work and concluded that strengths of judgment, teamwork, leadership, and self-regulation shows relevance to work and was associated with flourishing.

Thus, management in organizations can use character strengths intervention to help employees in achievement of high well-being and flourishing.

Promoting Job Crafting among Employees

Organizations can develop a culture where job crafting is encouraged. Job crafting is a simple practice which allows employee to reflect on his or her work and the work relationships. Through job crafting employee can restructure tasks in order to make it more challenging and interesting as well as effective **(Vanderweele, 2021).** Secondly through job crafting employees can also structure tasks in a way that makes it more meaningful and that help employee to form social relationships at work **(Vanderweele, 2021).**

It has been found that job crafting provides employees more discretion, autonomy and control at work. **Demerouti, Bakker and Gevers (2015)** suggested that the more individuals seek resources at work through job crafting the more engaged they are in their work the more they flourish in their life. **Slemp, Kern** and **Vella-Brodrick (2015)** proposed that employees who did job crafting experienced the highest amount of perceived autonomy support and higher workplace well-being.

Thus, it can be concluded here that in the post Covid era there is an urgent necessity to study and explore the multi-dimensional constructs of well-being. In the light of the challenges of Covid outbreak, remote working trends and the high burnout exhibited by the Great resignation phenomenon, the need to promote flourishing has become more and more important. The interventions suggested in the form of psychological capital, character strengths, gratitude, job crafting are easy and cost-effective methods which must be implemented within workplaces.

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