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Systematic literature review on the theory of Social Embeddedness of Thriving at Work

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Authors:
Listya Istiningtyas[1,2]
Debora E. Purba[1]
Elizabeth K. Poerwandari[1]
Bagus Takwin[1]
Mirra N. Milla[1]

Affiliations:
[1]Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia

[2]Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah, Palembang, Indonesia

Corresponding author:
Listya Istiningtyas,
listya.istiningtyas@ui.ac.id

Orientation: Industrial and organisational psychology has increasingly focussed on Thriving at Work (TAW), particularly shaped by the Social Embeddedness of Thriving at Work (SEMTW) model, which examines how employees' social interactions within the workplace enhance their growth and performance.

Research purpose: This study explores the latest literature on the SEMTW model, highlighting its significance in enhancing employee well-being and organisational performance, while identifying research trends and proposing future directions.

Motivation for the study: The findings guide future research to refine the SEMTW model and address emerging challenges in the modern work environment.

Research approach/design and method: A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted using the PRISMA model to ensure a rigorous process. Data were sourced from Harzing's Publish or Perish via Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Out of 338 articles, 14 met the inclusion criteria after screening.

Main findings: Leadership styles, individual traits, and organisational practices have advanced SEMTW understanding. The study highlights the growing complexity of thriving in workplaces influenced by digital transformation and globalisation.

Practical/managerial implications: Findings contribute to industrial and organisational research on TAW, offering actionable recommendations for fostering thriving workforces through the SEMTW model.

Contribution/value-add: This research uniquely advances the SEMTW model by integrating modern workplace dynamics, such as digitalisation and hybrid work environments, offering insights for theoretical and organisational applications.

Keywords: thriving at work; social embeddedness of thriving at work; systematic literature review; vitality; learning.

Introduction

Thriving at Work (TAW), as a positive psychological state, has intrigued industrial and organisational psychology researchers for several decades. Thriving, derived from the word 'thrive', which means to grow vigorously, refers to employees' psychological growth in the workplace. Many experts have interpreted the definition of thriving differently (Brown et al., 2017, p. 168); however, it can generally be understood as 'the joint experience of development and success'. Notably, Spreitzer et al. (2005, p. 538), who are considered leading authorities in the field of thriving, define TAW as 'the psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work'. This definition highlights that thriving occurs when employees feel energetic and acquire new knowledge and skills simultaneously, fostering job competence and confidence (Spreitzer et al., 2010). For example, an individual feels energetic but does not experience learning new things, which indicates a low level of thriving. Furthermore, Saakvitne et al. (1998) described thriving as part of a continuous recovery and growth process rather than a fixed or binary state. This concept was further expanded by Spreitzer et al. (2005), who emphasise that thriving is dynamic and fluctuates depending on the support and learning opportunities available in the workplace. Recent studies, such as Prem et al. (2017), also affirm that meeting basic psychological needs such as autonomy and competence is vital to fostering thriving in supportive work environments.

Thriving is distinct from employee well-being, self-actualisation and the personality trait of growth-need strength (Porath et al., 2012). Thriving at work is uniquely tied to productivity,

integrating both individual psychological growth and direct contributions to organisational outcomes. For instance, resilience refers to recovering from setbacks, which is more reactive, whereas TAW is proactive, focussed on sustained growth and continuous learning. Flourishing, although related to positive mental health, does not emphasise the role of learning and productivity in the workplace. Similarly, subjective well-being relates to overall life satisfaction but lacks a direct link to professional development. Flow is a temporary state of deep engagement in tasks, while TAW represents an ongoing process of learning and engagement in everyday work. Finally, self-actualisation refers to achieving one's full potential after fulfilling other basic needs, while TAW centres on continuous development through work, contributing to personal growth and organisational success. In summary, while these constructs relate to positive individual experiences, TAW is more specific to the workplace and is particularly relevant to performance research (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

Although thriving is often discussed as an individual experience, the Social Embeddedness of Thriving at Work (SEMTW) model highlights the crucial role of social context in fostering thriving. Developed by Spreitzer et al. (2005), this model posits that individuals thrive through personal effort and integration into supportive organisational structures. Thriving is deeply embedded in social networks, leadership practices and organisational culture, providing the necessary conditions for employees to experience vitality and learning. Kleine et al. (2019) further emphasise that social and organisational support are critical antecedents to thriving, particularly in environments fostering leadership development and learning opportunities.

In light of the unprecedented global shift to remote and hybrid working environments, driven by digital transformation and the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, there is a pressing need to reassess the existing models of TAW. This review addresses these contemporary challenges by examining the latest research developments in the SEMTW model. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the latest developments in thriving model, identify key trends and suggest future research directions to enhance the application of SEMTW in modern work environments. Despite the growing body of research on SEMTW and TAW, there remains a need for a comprehensive synthesis of recent developments, current trends and future pathways. Thus, this study seeks to offer fresh insights into the role of SEMTW in promoting thriving, particularly by addressing three key research questions: (1) *What are the latest developments in SEMTW model?* (2) *What are the current research trends in TAW?* (3) *What are the future research directions?*

Foundations and framework of Thriving at Work

Theoretical background of Thriving at Work

Thriving at work refers to the simultaneous experience of vitality and learning, essential for promoting personal development and organisational success. A key theoretical framework that explains thriving in the workplace is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), originally introduced by Deci and Ryan (1985). Self-Determination Theory argues that human motivation is driven by satisfying three core psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Autonomy relates to feeling control over one's actions, competence refers to a sense of effectiveness in task completion, and relatedness involves forming meaningful relationships with others. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), employees experience enhanced intrinsic motivation and well-being when these needs are fulfilled, vital for sustaining vitality and continuous learning at work (Baard et al., 2004). Thriving occurs when employees are motivated to engage deeply in their work while maintaining their energy levels. Recent findings from Van den Broeck et al. (2016) also affirm the critical role of psychological needs in fostering engagement and thriving.

Building on SDT, Spreitzer et al. (2005) further explore how individual agency and organisational context shape the experience of TAW. Their SEMTW model emphasises the importance of supportive organisational structures, such as leadership practices and team dynamics, in fostering autonomy and competence. Employees who feel empowered to take initiative and are supported in developing their skills are likelier to experience vitality and engage in self-directed learning (Gagné & Deci, 2005). When these psychological needs are unmet, employees may face reduced motivation and energy, which limits their capacity to learn and grow, ultimately hindering their ability to thrive (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Prem et al. (2017) highlight that leadership styles fostering autonomy and providing challenge are particularly effective in enhancing vitality and learning core components of thriving. The interaction between these needs and a supportive organisational environment is thus crucial for sustaining thriving.

This study adopts the SEMTW model as the primary framework for exploring TAW. Developed by Spreitzer et al. (2005), this model integrates SDT by demonstrating how social factors in the workplace, such as leadership support, autonomy in decision-making and collaborative team cultures, contribute to employee thriving (Baxter et al., 2020). The SEMTW framework explains how social contexts influence the satisfaction of autonomy, competence and relatedness, essential for motivating employees to thrive. By meeting these needs, employees experience improved motivation, well-being and performance (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Therefore, the SEMTW model offers a comprehensive understanding of how TAW is deeply embedded in the social and structural dynamics of the organisation.

Key component and impact of Thriving at Work

Spreitzer et al. (2005) highlight three factors of employee thriving: agentic work behaviours, unit contextual features and resources produced in doing work. Firstly, agentic work

behaviours refer to employees' proactive actions to shape their work environment, fostering vitality and learning. These behaviours help employees meet immediate job demands while creating conditions that encourage continuous growth. Research by Carmeli and Spreitzer (2009) shows that agentic behaviours, such as task focus and exploration, are crucial for driving innovation and engagement, reinforcing both competence and vitality. Sub-components of agentic behaviours include Task Focus, where employees efficiently manage their tasks, leading to a stronger sense of competence and control; Exploration, which involves seeking new ideas and approaches to drive personal and professional innovation; and Heedful Relating, which emphasises the importance of strong interpersonal bonds and trust within teams, enhancing collaboration and collective achievement (Niessen et al., 2012).
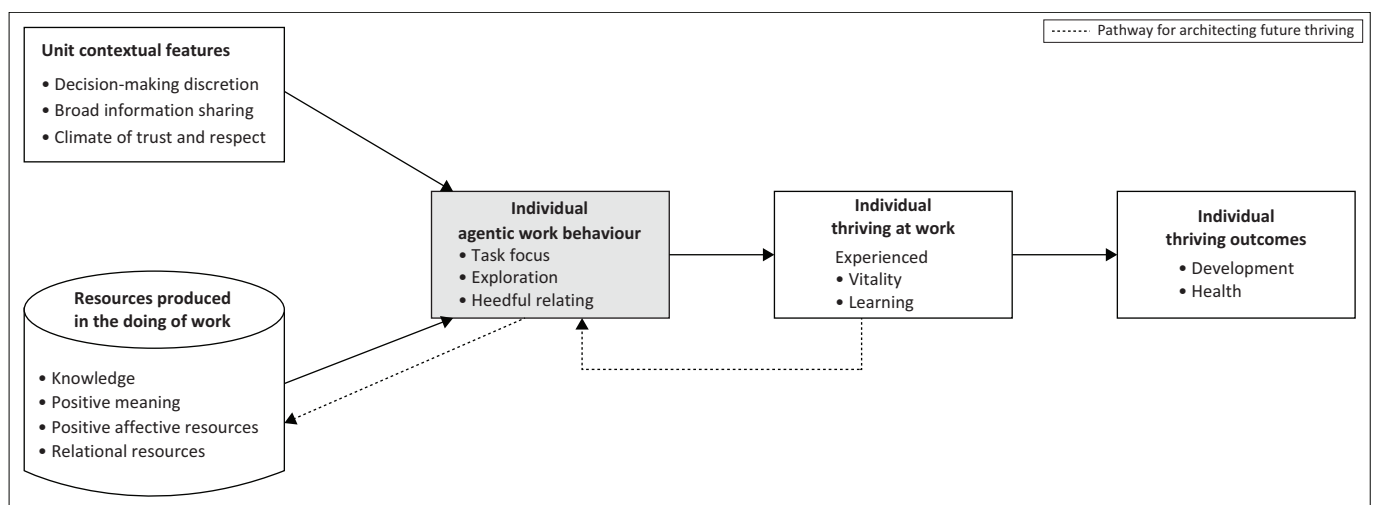
Secondly, unit contextual features encompass the broader environmental and structural elements that support thriving. These features include Decision-Making Discretion, where employees are given autonomy in their projects, leading to higher job satisfaction and a greater sense of ownership (Paterson et al., 2014); Broad Information Sharing, which ensures employees have access to relevant information that aligns their efforts with organisational goals (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009); and a Climate of Trust and Respect, which encourages calculated risk-taking and sharing innovative ideas, fostering a culture of continuous improvement (Kleine et al., 2019).

Finally, the resources produced in doing work result in valuable outcomes that arise as employees engage with their tasks. These resources include Knowledge Resources gained from continuous learning and skill development, helping employees adapt and thrive; Positive Meaning, where employees derive a sense of purpose from their work, driving them to excel; Positive Affective Resources, such as joy and satisfaction, which enhance resilience and problem-solving; and Relational Resources, which involve strong interpersonal connections that are essential for sustaining thriving (Walumbwa et al., 2018).

As depicted in Figure 1, the model emphasises the reciprocal relationships between these factors. The interaction between Resources Produced and Agentic Work Behaviours creates a positive feedback loop, where proactive behaviours generate resources that further reinforce these behaviours. Similarly, the connection between Agentic Work Behaviours and Individual Thriving forms a cyclical process where thriving enhances vitality and learning, motivating continued proactive engagement. This interconnectedness ensures that thriving and agentic behaviours continuously reinforce each other, driving sustained growth and well-being in the workplace. Based on research, several work contexts are essential for fostering this thriving cycle, including social support (Walumbwa et al., 2018), job autonomy (Paterson et al., 2014), an innovation-supportive culture (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009), career development opportunities (Porath et al., 2012), job challenges (Prem et al., 2017) and transformational leadership (Niessen et al., 2012). These factors create an environment that nurtures both agentic behaviours and individual thriving, further enhancing the reciprocal and reinforcing nature of the model.

Spreitzer et al. (2005), identified key outcomes of TAW, such as enhanced vitality, continuous learning and overall well-being, which collectively lead to higher job satisfaction and increased employee engagement. These factors create an environment where employees are motivated and can sustain personal and professional growth. Recent studies corroborate these findings, showing that thriving enhances psychological resilience, enabling employees to maintain high performance under challenging conditions while improving mental health, reducing emotional exhaustion and strengthening psychological capital, which is essential for maintaining a productive and engaged workforce. Beyond individual benefits, thriving profoundly impacts organisational outcomes, fostering a positive workplace

Source: Spreitzer, G., Sutcliffe, K., Dutton, J., Sonenshein, S., & Grant, A. (2005). A socially embedded model of thriving at work. *Organisation Science, 16*(5), 537–549. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1050.0153

FIGURE 1: The Social Embeddedness of Thriving at Work.

culture characterised by innovation, collaboration and trust, which are critical for long-term success. Research links thriving to lower turnover intentions and working towards higher organisational commitment and increased productivity (Moore et al., 2022; Spreitzer & Porath, 2012) also show that it mitigates the effects of role overload and emotional exhaustion, supporting sustained organisational health (Farid et al., 2023; Kleine et al., 2023; Mahomed & Rothmann, 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). These findings highlight the strategic importance of fostering thriving environments benefiting employees and organisations.

Methods

Design

The research method employed in this study utilises a systematic literature review (SLR) approach. This method involves a thorough and organised review to identify, select and evaluate relevant research, and collect and analyse the data obtained (Siddaway et al., 2019). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines define a systematic review as a process utilised to identify, select and synthesise evidence, emphasising the design, implementation and analysis features that could introduce bias (Page et al., 2021b). It helps researchers prepare research protocols by compiling all relevant evidence that meets predetermined eligibility criteria to answer research questions (Page et al., 2021a). The PRISMA process is illustrated in Figure 2.

Data search procedure and data selection strategy

The researchers searched for data sources using Harzing's Publish or Perish application, Version 8.12.4612 (Adams, 2024). Researchers selected articles from Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar, chosen for their extensive collections and broad coverage of relevant literature. The search process was guided by keywords relevant to the SLR topic, including 'thriving at work', 'thrive at work', 'job thriving', and 'social embeddedness of thriving at work'. These keywords were tested and refined to ensure comprehensive search results.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria for the literature search were:

- Literature published in the last 5 years (2019–2024) was included to ensure the data are current. This period captures significant changes in workplace dynamics, such as digital transformation, remote work, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have influenced how organisations and employees experience thriving. Focussing on recent literature ensures that the study reflects the latest trends.
- Articles should utilise the SEMTW (Spreitzer et al., 2005) to ensure relevance to the research topic.
- Empirical research and literature review. Only include empirical research and literature reviews related to TAW
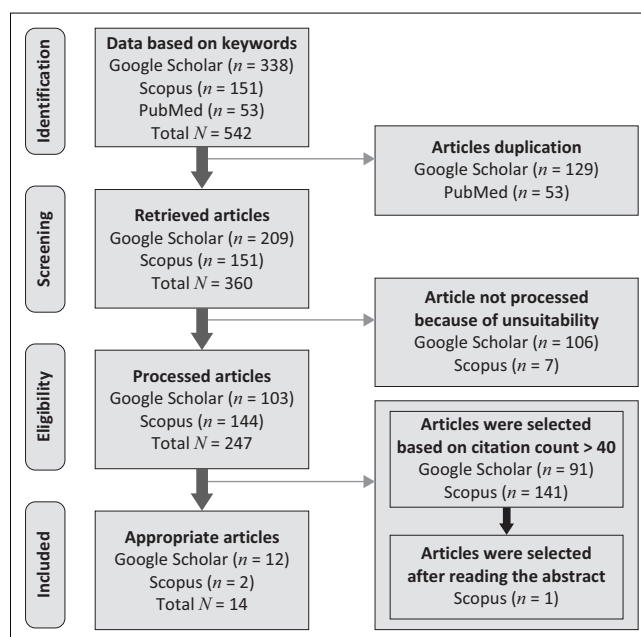

FIGURE 2: Article search process flowchart.

were included, ensuring the article provides relevant empirical or theoretical reviews.
- Only articles written in English were included to ensure language consistency and ease of assessment.
- Including articles with over 40 citations ensures that the most influential studies are considered while allowing for newer studies with novel insights. The chosen databases offer broad psychological and organisational research coverage, ensuring relevant studies were included.

The exclusion criteria were:

- Articles published before 2019 were excluded to focus on recent research. Kleine (2019) already summarised earlier studies, therefore including older articles would be repetitive and not add new insights.
- Articles in the form of books, theses, dissertations, proceedings and papers not published as journal publications were excluded to ensure consistent quality standards.
- Articles that were not fully accessible were excluded to ensure that all data could be accessed and adequately evaluated.

Article search process

The article search process, depicted in Figure 2, involved the stages of Identification, Screening, Eligibility and Inclusion, focussing on studies discussing TAW using SEMTW model, published between 2019 and April 2024. In the Identification phase, a comprehensive search was conducted using well-defined keywords across critical academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus and PubMed. This search yielded 542 articles: 338 from Google Scholar, 151 from Scopus and 53 from PubMed. Following this, 182 duplicate entries were identified and excluded –

129 from Google Scholar and 53 from PubMed – refining the dataset to 360 articles. The Screening process involved a meticulous examination to remove articles that did not meet the suitability criteria, excluding 113 articles (106 from Google Scholar and 7 from Scopus). This approach ensured that only the most relevant studies progressed to the next stage.

In the Eligibility stage, 247 articles (103 from Google Scholar and 144 from Scopus) were thoroughly evaluated based on their relevance to the research question, methodological rigour and availability of full texts. A citation count threshold was applied as a critical inclusion criterion, excluding articles with fewer than 40 citations to prioritise highly influential studies. In the final Inclusion phase, 14 articles that met all eligibility criteria were selected for their significant contributions to the research domain, robust methodological standards and substantial citation impact. Of these, 12 articles were sourced from Google Scholar and 2 from Scopus, representing the most relevant and rigorous studies available for subsequent analysis. This systematic and thorough approach ensured a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis, guaranteeing the relevance and quality of the literature reviewed.

Data extraction and synthesis

Data were collected through careful reading and note-taking, identifying key concepts and themes related to the SEMTW model. The findings were synthesised and organised into categories to explore the latest literature review on SEMTW model, identify research trends related to TAW, and outline future research directions. Data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet containing journal descriptions, article content and reviews. The qualitative descriptive data were synthesised through meta-synthesis, a data integration technique to derive new, comprehensive theories or concepts (Perry & Hammond, 2002). Meta-aggregation synthesis was utilised to summarise existing research findings and answer research questions. The research topics were elaborated into specific themes to produce an analytical framework. The articles that were obtained were compared and summarised according to relevant themes.

Ethical considerations

This study utilised a SLR and this article does not contain any studies involving human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

Results

Description and content of the journal articles reviewed

Table 1 includes a detailed breakdown of methodologies, study contexts and key findings, providing a clearer comparison across reviewed literature. Based on the 14 reviewed articles, most of which were published in highly respected international psychology journals between 2019 and 2022, it is evident that other researchers frequently cite these articles. They predominantly use quantitative research methods, relying on numerical data and statistical analysis. However, two of the reviewed articles are literature reviews, which focus on theoretical insights and secondary data rather than conducting empirical quantitative analysis. The data for these quantitative studies were collected directly from real-world settings, such as workplaces rather than controlled lab environments. Most studies aim to empirically validate the SEMTW model using mediation and moderation models to examine relationships between antecedents and outcomes of TAW. The TAW Scale (Porath et al., 2012), covering vitality and learning, is the primary measurement tool, although some studies used alternative scales (Babalola et al., 2022; Basinska & Rozkwitalska, 2022). The participants were mainly employees from various sectors, most of studies were conducted in China. Highly cited articles often collected data in two phases, either from supervisors or through multiple field studies (Alikaj et al., 2021; Christensen-Salem et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021; Zeng et al., 2020); or gathered data from two field studies (Babalola et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2020). These studies employed complex analytical methods such as meta-analytic regression models, path analysis and confirmatory factor analysis.

Key findings from the journal articles reviewed

The review of 14 journal articles in Table 2 revealed several key findings. These findings offer insights into how leadership, individual traits, organisational practices and potential negative impacts influence TAW. These themes highlight patterns seen in the reviewed studies.

Leadership styles and their influence on thriving

Leadership is pivotal in fostering thriving within organisations, with various leadership styles integrated into SEMTW. Paradoxical leadership balances conflicting demands and enhances creativity and psychological safety – both crucial for promoting thriving (Yang et al., 2021). Ethical leadership fosters ethical climates, contributing to psychological well-being and trust (Yousaf et al., 2019). Inclusive leadership promotes diversity and encourages employee engagement, which is essential for thriving (Zeng et al., 2020). Transformational leadership inspires continuous improvement and resilience (Lin et al., 2020). Kleine et al. (2019) further validate these leadership styles' impact on reducing burnout and enhancing job satisfaction.

Individual traits and psychological resources

Individual traits such as proactive personality, self-efficacy, optimism and resilience are significant in fostering thriving. These traits help employees navigate complex environments

TABLE 1: Description of reviewed journal articles.

Number	Authors	Objectives, methods, and results of the research
1	Alikaj et al. (2021)	**Objectives:** To examine the role of TAW in the relationship between proactive personality and creative behavior, moderated by high-involvement HR practices. **Methods:** The study included 438 employees from different industries in China, focusing on those whose supervisors also participated. TAW was measured using the TAW Scale by Porath et al. (2012), using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and moderated mediation analysis. **Results:** TAW mediates the relationship between proactive personality and creative behavior, and high-involvement HR practices strengthen this mediation.
2	Babalola et al. (2022)	**Objectives:** To explore the relationship between supervisor bottom-line mentality, TAW, and employee insomnia. **Methods:** Using data from two field studies conducted in China (340 employees) and the United States (174 employees). TAW was measured using 11-item scale used by Russo et al. (2018), and using Mplus version 7. **Results:** Supervisor BLM boosts employee thriving through a competitive climate but also causes insomnia, with highly competitive employees thriving more, though competitiveness doesn't affect insomnia.
3	Basinska and Rozkwitalska (2022)	**Objectives:** To investigate the mediating role of employee thriving in the relationship between psychological capital and happiness at work in MNCs. **Methods:** The study included 137 full-time employees from multinational corporations with diverse cultural backgrounds. Vitality was measured with a 3-item subscale of vigor of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006), learning by using a 5-item scale adopted from Learning Goal Orientation Scale (Vandewalle, 1997). Using regression and mediation techniques. **Results:** TAW mediates the relationship between psychological capital and happiness at work.
4	Chang and Busser (2020)	**Objectives:** To explore how contextual factors influence hospitality career retention, with TAW as a mediator. **Methods:** The study included 300 full-time employees in the hospitality industry. TAW was measured using the TAW Scale by Porath et al. (2012), with regression and mediation analysis conducted on the data. **Results:** TAW mediates the relationship between contextual factors and career retention in hospitality, with organisational support enhancing this effect.
5	Christensen-Salem et al. (2021)	**Objectives:** To explore the role of TAW as a mediator between creative self-efficacy and creative performance, with work significance and task interdependence as moderators. **Methods:** The study involved 795 employees and 149 supervisors at two different time periods. TAW was measured using the TAW Scale by Porath et al. (2012), and using multi-level path modeling. **Results:** TAW mediates the relationship between creative self-efficacy and creative performance, with more substantial effects under high work significance and task interdependence.
6	Goh et al. (2022)	**Objectives:** To provide an integrative multilevel review of TAW and identify areas for future research. **Methods:** The review focused on studies exploring thriving at the individual, team, and organisational levels. Various measures of thriving were considered, depending on the study. Using integrative review and meta-synthesis. **Results:** TAW is influenced by multiple factors, from individual traits to organisational culture, significantly impacting work outcomes at all levels.
7	Jiang et al. (2020)	**Objectives:** To examine how task identity and autonomy relate to job satisfaction, with mentoring and TAW as moderators. **Methods:** The study included 140 university students in China and 522 nursing students in Australia, all participating in structured educational programs with mentoring. Thriving was measured using the TAW Scale by Porath et al. (2012), and using regression analysis. **Results:** TAW mediates the relationship between task identity, autonomy, and job satisfaction, with mentoring enhancing this effect.
8	Kleine et al. (2019)	**Objectives:** Conduct a meta-analysis on the predictors and outcomes of TAW across different contexts. **Methods:** The meta-analysis included 21,739 participants from various studies across multiple industries, focusing on those that measured thriving. Various scales were used, focusing on Porath et al. (2012), using Meta-analytic regression models and path analysis. **Results:** the findings of this meta-analysis support Sprcitzer and colleagues' model and underscore the importance of thriving in the work context.
9	Lin et al. (2020)	**Objectives:** To investigate the mediating roles of challenge and hindrance stressors in the relationship between transformational leadership and TAW. **Methods:** The study included 542 employees from various industries in China, all working under transfonuational leadership. Thriving was measured using the TAW Scale by Porath et al. (2012), and using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). **Results:** Transformational leadership enhances both challenge stressors and TAW. Challenge stressors act as a mediator between transformational leadership and thriving. Supervisor developmental feedback strengthens the connection between challenge stressors and thriving.
10	Liu et al. (2020)	**Objectives:** To explore how a paradox mindset influences innovative work behavior through TAW. **Methods:** The study two points in time involved 369 employees and 90 supervisors from 11 companies in China across diverse industries. Thriving was measured using the TAW Scale by Porath et al., (2012), using Multilevel Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). **Results:** TAW mediates the relationship between a paradoxical mindset and innovative behavior. Leaders' paradox mindset strengthens this relationship.
11	Yang et al. (2021)	**Objectives:** To investigate why and when paradoxical leader behavior impacts employee creativity, focusing on TAW and psychological safety. **Methods:** The study involved 139 supervisor-employee dyads in four Chinese enterprises. Thriving was measured using the TAW Scale by Porath et al. (2012), using Confirmatory Factor Analyses and Hierarchical regression. **Results:** TAW mediate the relationship between paradoxical leader behavior and employee creativity, this positive relationship will be stronger when there are higher levels of psychological safety.
12	Yousaf et al. (2019)	**Objectives:** To examine the impact of ethical leadership and TAW on the psychological well-being of employees, with voice behavior as a mediator. **Methods:** The study included 297 full-time employees in customer service roles at South Asian telecommunications companies. Thriving was measured using the TAW Scale by Porath et al. (2012), and using confirmatory factor analysis. **Results:** TAW and ethical leadership improve employee psychological well-being, with employee voice behavior mediating this relationship.
13	Zeng et al. (2020)	**Objectives:** To explore the role of psychological safety and TAW in the relationship between inclusive leadership and taking-charge behavior. **Methods:** The study included 205 pairs of employees and their supervisors at 17 companies in mainland China. Thriving was measured using the TAW Scale by Porath et al. (2012), and using confumatory factor analyses. **Results:** TAW mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and taking-charge behavior, with psychological safety as a critical component.
14	Zhai et al. (2020)	**Objectives:** To study how workplace support influences life satisfaction through TAW. **Methods:** The study included 305 full-time employees from organisations in Guangdong, China, working in varied roles with workplace support. The TAW Scale by Porath et al. (2012) measured TAW, using Structural equation modelling. **Results:** TAW mediates the relationship between workplace support and life satisfaction.

Note: Please see the full reference list of this article Istiningtyas, L., Purba, D.E., Poerwandari, E.K., Takwin, B., & Milla, M.N. (2025). Systematic literature review on the theory of social embeddedness of thriving at work. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology/SA Tydskrif vir Bedryfsielkunde*, *51*(0), a2229. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v51i0.2229, for more information.

TAW, Thriving at Work; SEM, Stuctural Equation Modeling (SEM); MNC, Multi-national Corporation; BLM; Bottom-Line Mentality.

and maintain high performance (Alikaj et al., 2021; Basinska & Rozkwitalska, 2022). Creative self-efficacy enhances an individual's belief in their creative abilities, which fuels TAW and, in turn, leads to improved creative performance by encouraging persistence and adaptability in the face of challenges (Christensen-Salem et al., 2021). A proactive

TABLE 2: Summary of reviewed journal articles.

Number	Authors	Recent Developments, Trends, and Future Directions in the Social Embeddedness of Thriving at Work
1	Alikaj et al. (2021)	SEMTW now includes proactive personality traits and high-involvement HR practices, showing how individual traits can boost thriving when supported by organisational structures. Research increasingly focuses on how personal traits like proactive personality interact with organisational practices to foster thriving. Future studies should explore how proactive personalities and HR practices can be optimised to support thriving across different industries.
2	Babalola et al. (2022)	SEMTW now considers the potential negative impacts of thriving, especially on work-life balance, acknowledging its dual effects. Research highlights the complexity of thriving, noting risks like insomnia or work-life conflict due to increased work engagement. Future studies should explore ways to reduce these adverse effects and ensure TAW does not harm personal well-being, focusing on how organisational support can balance thriving with a healthy work-life balance.
3	Basinska and Rozkwitalska (2022)	The model now applies to multinational corporations, highlighting psychological capital's role in fostering thriving across diverse cultures. Research focuses on how psychological resources like self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience enable thriving in global settings. Future studies should explore ways to strengthen psychological capital in culturally diverse environments and ensure sustained thriving.
4	Chang and Busse (2020)	SEMTW has been applied to the hospitality industry, showing that thriving helps with career retention, especially in high turnover environments. There is growing interest in industry-specific thriving applications, particularly in sectors like hospitality, where job satisfaction and retention are essential. Future research should explore the factors affecting thriving and retention in service industries and how thriving can be promoted to improve career longevity and employee satisfaction in high-turnover sectors.
5	Christensen-Salem et al. (2021)	The model now recognises self-regulation as a mediator between creative self-efficacy and performance, connecting thriving with individual regulatory mechanisms. Research increasingly focuses on how self-regulation mediates the link between thriving and outcomes like creativity and performance, highlighting the role of personal self-management. Future studies should investigate the long-term effects of self-regulation on thriving and creativity, including its interaction with organisational factors.
6	Goh et al. (2022)	The model has been adapted to tackle the challenges and opportunities of digital transformation and remote work, indicating the need for evolving thriving frameworks. Research increasingly examines how digital and remote work environments impact thriving, emphasising the importance of adapting frameworks to support psychological safety and social connections in virtual settings. Future studies should focus on sustaining thriving in virtual and hybrid work environments, exploring the role of digital communication tools and remote leadership.
7	Jiang et al. (2020)	Mentoring is recognised as a key factor in SEMTW. It strengthens the connections between task identity, autonomy, and thriving, which enhances job satisfaction. Research highlights mentoring's role in boosting thriving and supporting job satisfaction. Future studies should explore mentoring's long-term impact on thriving and career satisfaction across different organisations and how it can be integrated into leadership and HR practices to optimise thriving.
8	Kleine et al. (2019)	The meta-analysis validated SEMTW across different organisational contexts, confirming its effectiveness in reducing burnout and increasing job satisfaction. Research trends reinforce thriving as crucial for well-being and preventing burnout. Future studies should explore the factors contributing to thriving in various settings and develop strategies to systematically support thriving across industries to improve job satisfaction and reduce burnout.
9	Lin et al. (2020)	Transformational leadership has been integrated into SEMTW, showing its effectiveness in managing stressors and promoting thriving. Research increasingly recognises the role of transformational leadership in fostering a thriving work environment. Future studies should explore how transformational leadership can better manage stressors across various organisations and examine its long-term impact on thriving.
10	Liu et al. (2020)	The model now includes the paradox mindset, which boosts thriving and innovation by helping employees manage opposing tensions. Research trends focus on how cognitive frameworks like the paradox mindset influence thriving and innovation. Future studies should explore the broader application of the paradox inindset in different organisations, especially its long-tam impact, and how it can be cultivated across industries.
11	Yang et al. (2021)	Paradoxical leadership, which balances conflicting demands, has been added to SEMTW, enhancing creativity and psychological safety, thus promoting thriving. Research increasingly explores how paradoxical leadership affects thriving and creativity, showing interest in leadership that handles complexity. Future studies should examine its application across different sectors and its impact on outcomes like employee engagement and retention, with longitudinal research to understand its long-term effects on thriving.
12	Yousaf et al. (2019)	Ethical leadership has been added to SEMTW, showing its role in fostering thriving by creating ethical climates and psychological safety. Research increasingly examines how ethical leadership boosts thriving, enhancing psychological well-being and ethical behaviour in organisations. Future studies should explore the impact of ethical leadership on thriving across different cultures and organisations, and investigate its long-term effects on thriving and overall performance.
13	Zeng et al. (2020)	Inclusive leadership has been integrated into SEMTW, emphasising its role in fostering psychological safety and thriving in diverse workplaces. Research increasingly focuses on how inclusive leadership creates supportive environments by promoting psychological safety and employee voice. Future studies should examine its impact across cultures and explore how to tailor inclusive leadership to specific organisational needs to optimise thriving.
14	Zhai et al. (2020)	Workplace support systems are recognised as key to SEMTW, with thriving linking support to life satisfaction. Research highlights the vital role of organisational support in boosting thriving and well-being, particularly in enhancing life satisfaction. Future studies should identify which types of support most effectively promote thriving and how these systems can be adapted to different organisational cultures and employee demographics.

personality influences psychological capital and creative behaviour, showing the broader role of individual traits in fostering TAW (Alikaj et al., 2021).

Organisational practices and contextual adaptation

Organisational practices, including mentoring and support systems, are essential for fostering thriving. Mentoring strengthens the connection between task identity, autonomy and thriving, improving job satisfaction and career development (Jiang et al., 2020). Robust organisational support systems improve well-being and life satisfaction (Zhai et al., 2020). In virtual and hybrid work environments, thriving frameworks must adapt to maintain social connectivity and psychological safety (Goh et al., 2022). Kleine et al. (2019) further highlights the importance of adaptable organisational practices for reducing burnout and promoting job satisfaction.

Potential negative impacts of thriving and industry-specific applications

While thriving typically has positive outcomes, there are potential downsides, such as insomnia or work-life conflict because of increased work engagement (Babalola et al., 2022). Managing these effects is crucial to maintaining balance. In industry-specific contexts, such as hospitality, thriving has been linked to improved career retention in high-turnover environments (Chang & Busser, 2020). Kleine et al. (2019) emphasise the need for balanced approaches to maximise thriving benefits while preventing burnout.

Discussion

Latest developments in Social Embeddedness of Thriving at Work

The SEMTW model, proposed by Spreitzer et al. (2005), defines thriving as a combination of agentic work behaviours,

unit contextual features and resources generated from work. It posits that thriving arises from the interaction of individual initiative and organisational support. Subsequent research has extensively explored agentic work behaviours, where employees proactively shape their environment. For instance, Alikaj et al. (2021) demonstrated the role of proactive personality in fostering thriving in high-involvement work environments. Additionally, Christensen-Salem et al. (2021) concluded that self-leadership and creative self-efficacy enable employees to thrive in fast-paced, demanding environments. These findings are supported by other studies that have highlighted the importance of psychological resources in fostering thriving (Porath et al., 2012). Perceived organisational support (POS) has also emerged as a critical factor, as it enhances psychological safety and life satisfaction, further facilitating thriving (Zhai et al., 2020).

Kleine et al. (2019) expanded SEMTW through their 'Conceptual Model and Nomological Network of Assumed Antecedents and Outcomes of Thriving at Work', highlighting the importance of leadership in promoting thriving. They distinguished between transformational and inclusive leadership, arguing that adaptable leadership fosters psychological safety, social connectivity and innovation, which reduces burnout and improves job satisfaction (Lin et al., 2020; Zeng et al., 2020). Recent research by Jiang et al. (2020) found that mentoring and robust leadership indirectly strengthen employees' task identity and autonomy, driving them to thrive. Moreover, Basinska and Rozkwitalska (2022) also showed that psychological capital, such as self-efficacy and resilience, plays a vital role in promoting thriving, underscoring the role of leaders in creating supportive environments.

Goh et al. (2022) further advanced SEMTW by adapting the model to digital and hybrid work settings in their 'Integrative Multilevel Review of Thriving at Work'. They emphasised that thriving in these environments relies on maintaining social connectivity and psychological safety despite physical distance. In addition, Zhai et al. (2020) highlighted the role of POS in enhancing well-being in virtual settings. Goh et al. (2022) argued that thriving can be sustained even in dispersed teams with the right digital tools and leadership practices. However, Babalola et al. (2022) cautioned that over-engagement in thriving can lead to work-life imbalance, emphasising the need for balanced organisational practices. These findings reflect an evolution in understanding that thriving is influenced by both individual behaviours and how organisations adapt to technological advancements and changing work structures.

Current research trends in thriving at work

Recent studies, building on the foundational work of Spreitzer et al. (2005), identify three key factors for TAW: agentic work behaviours, unit contextual features and resources produced in doing work. Agentic work behaviours refer to proactive efforts employees make to shape their work environment, promoting both vitality and learning. Traits such as proactive

personality, self-leadership and heedful relating play an essential role in helping employees meet job demands while fostering conditions for continuous growth and innovation (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Niessen et al., 2012). Proactive personality, introduced by Bateman and Crant (1993), encourages employees to explore new opportunities and adapt to complex environments, supporting exploration and task focus, which are vital to thriving (Alikaj et al., 2021). Similarly, self-leadership, as defined by Manz (1986), enables individuals to regulate their actions, motivate themselves and take initiative – particularly important in settings where autonomy, such as remote or hybrid work, is crucial (Christensen-Salem et al., 2021). Heedful relating, which emphasises building strong interpersonal relationships and trust within teams, enhances collaboration and collective achievement, further boosting thriving (Goh et al., 2022; Niessen et al., 2012). Creative self-efficacy also strengthens thriving by boosting employees' confidence in their creative abilities, ultimately improving creative performance through persistence and adaptability (Christensen-Salem et al., 2021). Together, these agentic behaviours create a feedback loop that generates resources and sustains thriving, consistent with the SEMTW (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

In addition to agentic behaviours, unit contextual features play a key role in fostering the supportive environments necessary for thriving. Features such as decision-making discretion, broad information sharing and a climate of trust and respect are critical. Decision-making discretion grants employee's autonomy over their work, leading to higher job satisfaction and a sense of ownership, while information sharing ensures alignment with organisational goals (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Paterson et al., 2014). Leadership styles are crucial in shaping these conditions. Paradoxical leadership, for example, helps employees manage conflicting demands, fostering creativity and psychological safety, both of which are essential for thriving (Yang et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2015). Meanwhile, ethical leadership builds trust and integrity, reducing stress and increasing employee engagement (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Yousaf et al., 2019; Bedi et al., 2016). Inclusive leadership, as conceptualised by Carmeli et al. (2009), creates psychological safety and promotes proactive behaviours such as taking charge, which enhances collaboration and connection, especially in virtual or dynamic teams (Zeng et al., 2020). Transformational leadership, as defined by Burns (1978), elevates leaders and followers to higher levels of morality and motivation. Bass (1985) expanded on this by emphasising its role in fostering shared commitment and vision. This leadership style promotes resilience, continuous improvement, decision-making discretion, and enhances job satisfaction and autonomy (Lin et al., 2020; Kleine et al., 2019). Together, these leadership styles foster an environment of trust, collaboration and innovation, all essential for maintaining thriving workplaces.

Lastly, the resources produced through work are critical for sustaining thriving. Perceived Organisational Support, introduced by Eisenberger et al. (1986), enhances employee confidence and well-being, especially in hybrid or virtual

settings where opportunities for social interaction are limited (Zhai et al., 2020). These resources include knowledge, gained through continuous learning, and positive meaning, derived from a sense of purpose in work. In addition, positive affective resources such as joy and satisfaction promote resilience and problem-solving, while relational resources, strengthened by interpersonal connections, support long-term thriving (Walumbwa et al., 2018). Flexible work arrangements and professional development opportunities provide employees with the tools to balance job demands with personal well-being, further supporting sustained thriving (Goh et al., 2022). However, organisations must carefully manage over-engagement in thriving behaviours to avoid negative consequences such as insomnia, stress and burnout, particularly in high-pressure environments (Babalola et al., 2022). The interaction between agentic behaviours and resources reinforces a reciprocal process that ensures sustained thriving, promoting continuous growth and well-being for both employees and organisations (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Thus, organisations must ensure that the balance between agentic behaviours, supportive environments and resources is carefully managed to sustain long-term success and well-being.

Future research directions

Despite recent progress in understanding TAW, several important questions remain unanswered, requiring further research. While some studies have explored the link between leadership styles and thriving (Lin et al., 2020), more research is needed to assess the sustainability of these effects over time. Leadership styles such as paradoxical, ethical and transformational leadership have been associated with thriving in various contexts, but their long-term impact, particularly in industries undergoing rapid digital transformation, requires further investigation (Goh et al., 2022). In addition, future research should examine the role of POS in maintaining thriving, especially in hybrid and remote work environments, where POS enhances psychological safety and engagement, which are critical when face-to-face support is limited (Zhai et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the potential downsides of thriving, such as work-life imbalance and burnout, warrant closer examination. Babalola et al. (2022) highlighted that although thriving offers many benefits, it can also lead to increased stress and insomnia, particularly in high-demand work settings. Similarly, Basinska and Rozkwitalska (2022) noted that poorly managed thriving can result in emotional exhaustion and reduced well-being. To ensure thriving remains sustainable, future studies should explore strategies to balance thriving with personal well-being, especially in high-stress or high-turnover sectors. Moreover, individual traits such as proactive personality and self-leadership should be investigated to understand how they help employees manage the pressures of thriving in demanding work environments. These traits enable employees to seek growth opportunities and regulate behaviour – key for

sustained thriving (Alikaj et al., 2021; Christensen-Salem et al., 2021). Mentoring has also been found to promote thriving by enhancing task identity and autonomy (Jiang et al., 2020).

Finally, more research is needed to evaluate the generalisability of SEMTW across different industries and cultural contexts. Much of the existing research has focussed on corporate or educational settings, raising questions about its broader applicability. For example, Chang and Busser (2020) found that thriving improved career retention in the hospitality industry, which suggests SEMTW is relevant in high-turnover sectors. Similarly, Zhai et al. (2020) emphasised the importance of POS in improving life satisfaction across various work environments. Future research should explore how individual traits such as proactive personality and self-regulation interact with organisational practices in diverse cultural settings. This will help organisations create environments that enable thriving to be both achievable and sustainable across sectors and global workforces. Thriving at work is a multifaceted construct that requires an integrated approach, combining personal and organisational factors to support long-term success and employee well-being.

Practical implications

The evolution of SEMTW provides valuable guidance for organisations aiming to enhance employee thriving. Alikaj et al. (2021) highlighted how human resource (HR) practices that promote a proactive personality can significantly boost thriving. Similarly, fostering self-leadership and creative self-efficacy, as noted by Christensen-Salem et al. (2021), helps employees excel in fast-paced environments. Organisations should invest in paradoxical and ethical leadership styles to further encourage thriving. Yang et al. (2021) showed that paradoxical leadership fosters creativity by helping employees navigate conflicting demands, while Yousaf et al. (2019) and Bedi et al. (2016) stressed that ethical leadership is crucial for building trust and integrity, which form the foundation of a supportive work culture. Goh et al. (2022) also emphasised that leaders in remote and hybrid work environments must focus on maintaining social connectivity and psychological safety.

Beyond leadership, POS is crucial to employee well-being. Research by Zhai et al. (2020) found that POS improves psychological safety, particularly in virtual work settings. Organisations should also incorporate mentoring programmes, as Jiang et al. (2020) found that mentoring enhances task identity and autonomy – both essential for thriving. Offering flexible work arrangements and resources to help employees manage workloads is equally essential. However, thriving must be balanced with well-being. Babalola et al. (2022) and Basinska and Rozkwitalska (2022) warned that over-engagement can lead to stress and work-life imbalance. Organisations should provide mental health support and promote work-life balance to prevent this. By implementing these strategies, organisations can build a resilient, productive workforce for long-term success.

Limitations and further study

This SLR has several limitations. Firstly, the majority of the reviewed studies in this SLR employed quantitative methods. While qualitative approaches could offer deeper insights into TAW, they were underrepresented in the existing literature identified during the search process. Secondly, protocol registration was not conducted because of the exploratory nature of the SLR and time constraints, making early registration premature. Thirdly, a Risk of Bias Analysis (RBA) was not performed, as the review focussed on providing descriptive explanations and narrative findings rather than critically appraising methodologies.

Future research should address these limitations by incorporating qualitative approaches that offer deeper insights into the context of TAW and participants' subjective experiences. Conducting RBA in future studies is also crucial to assess the credibility of findings by identifying potential sources of bias. Future research should use meta-analyses to combine study results for more robust conclusions. It should also explore the long-term impact of hybrid work on employee thriving, especially how digital tools affect social connectivity and psychological safety in virtual environments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the SEMTW model illustrates the intricate relationship between individual initiative, leadership and organisational support in promoting employee thriving. Traits such as proactive personality and self-leadership empower employees to take control of their work environment, fostering creativity, adaptability and personal growth. These qualities are precious in fast-paced environments, where self-motivation and emotional regulation are critical for sustaining high performance. Leadership is crucial in creating an atmosphere of psychological safety and support. Transformational, inclusive and paradoxical leadership styles help build resilience, foster innovation and promote well-being. Organisational support, mainly through POS, enhances employee satisfaction and work-life balance, making thriving sustainable. This support is even more essential in remote and hybrid work settings, where maintaining social connectivity can be challenging. Together, these elements create a comprehensive framework for sustaining long-term thriving in dynamic and evolving work environments.

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Competing interests

Authors' contributions

L.I. was the primary researcher, conducting this study as part of her doctoral research and leading the article's writing. D.E.P. was the promotors contributing to the article's formal analysis, validation, data curation, review and editing the article. E.K.P., B.T. and M.N.M. served as supervisors, offering advisory support, assisting with the study's conceptualisation, methodology and refining the article.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of the study are available from the corresponding author, L.I. upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

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