

How to thrive at work: THE 5 ESSENTIALS

Thrive
LAB

Introduction

Why thriving matters

Happiness might seem like a silly thing for a business to focus on. You can use similar labels – people experience, staff engagement, culture change, mental wellbeing.

But no matter the label, this stuff isn't fluffy.

There's a very clear link between how your people are going, and how your business is going.

- A wide range of studies have shown that happier people tend to have superior work performance (see Lyubomirsky, King and Diener, 2005).
- Engaged employees are associated with an 18% lift in productivity, a 23% increase in profitability, and a 64% reduction in safety incidents (Gallup, 2020).
- Organisation-wide investments in employee wellbeing generate average ROI of 5:1, with peaks of 12:1, according to research by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research and Xero (2021).

How to thrive at work

This information pack provides a summary of the Thriving at Work framework - or the five essentials that teams and individuals need, in order to be happy and high-performing at work.

Each element is evidence based, and modifiable through effective work design.

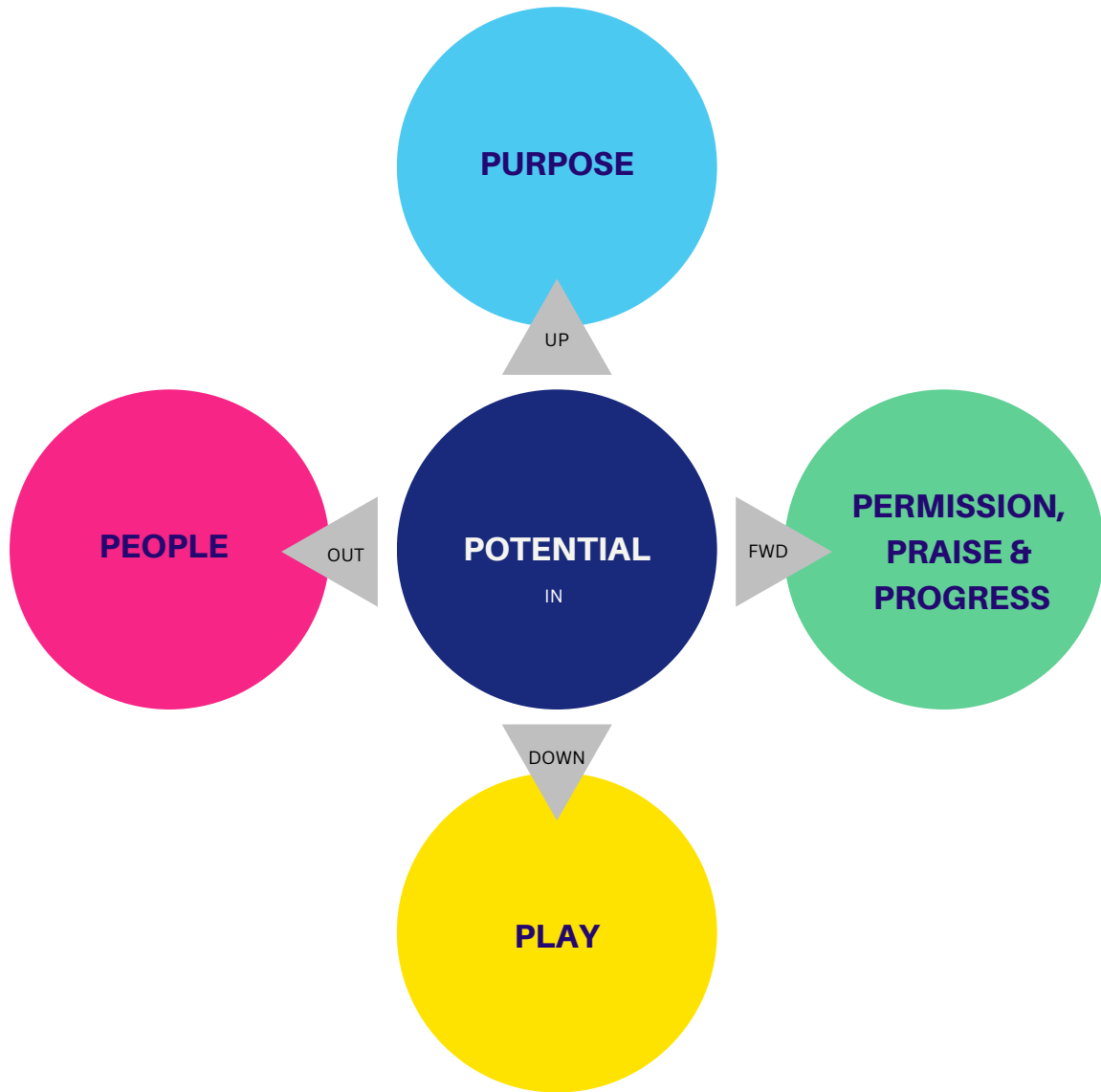
Check out www.thrivelab.org for more info about how I can help you to redesign work, so that it works for people. I'm a qualified behavioural scientist and team coach, a former big-4 management consultant, and I've studied happiness at one of the world's top universities.

I'd love to partner with you, to build happiness and high performance.

Take care!

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Thriving at Work Framework



The Thriving at Work framework is an evidence-based summary of the key dimensions that people need, to thrive in their role and organisation.

People

In a thriving team:

There's psychological safety

Psychological safety is *the* key characteristic in high-performing teams, according to Google's Project Aristotle research (Google, n.d.).

Psychological safety can be defined as “a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking” (Edmondson, 1999). There are four key levels of psychological safety - that you're included, safe to learn and make mistakes, safe to contribute and share your ideas, and safe to challenge or speak up when you think something isn't right (Clark, 2020).

People have good friends at work

Gallup has repeatedly shown that having best friends at work is one key to employee engagement and job success. It's strongly linked to business outcomes including profitability, retention and safety (Mann, 2018). In a broader sense, strong social relationships are highly predictive of a long and happy life (Holt-Lunstad, Smith and Layton, 2010; Vaillant, 2009).

“The people we interviewed from the good-to-great companies clearly loved what they did, largely because they loved **who they did it with.**”
(Jim Collins, Good to Great)

Managers catalyse thriving

According to international research summarised by McKinsey (2020),

- 25% of your overall life satisfaction is driven by your job satisfaction
- 39% of your job satisfaction is driven by your interpersonal relationships
- 86% of your satisfaction with interpersonal relationships is driven by your relationships with management

All of which is to say - your relationships with management matter, a lot. In fact, the Workforce Institute at UKG (2023) found that managers impact mental health as much as a spouse, and more so than a therapist or doctor.

The most effective managers help to catalyse change across the Thriving at Work framework:

People

- Creating an inclusive team environment
- Communicating well - listening, sharing

Purpose

- Setting a clear vision

Potential

- Coaching and supporting development
- Using technical skills to advise the team

Permission, praise and progress

- Empowering, not micromanaging

Play

- Caring for personal wellbeing

(Harrell and Barbato, 2018)

Purpose

In a thriving team:

People do meaningful work

People who have a strong sense of meaning in their lives typically enjoy high levels of wellbeing (eg Zika and Chamberlain, 1992). And for many people, work is a key source of meaning - or we'd like it to be. Organisational psychologist, Adam Grant, explains that "In national surveys over the past three decades, the vast majority of Americans have identified meaningful work as the single most important feature that they seek in a job" (Grant, 2011, p.98).

When people have a strong sense of purpose at work, they are more productive, more resilient and healthier, and more likely to stay long term, according to a huge range of studies including research by McKinsey (Dhringa et al, 2021).

'Busy work' is reduced insofar as possible

Workload is often the biggest source of stress for employees (Southern Cross Health Insurance and BusinessNZ, 2021). Yet evidence suggests more than half of people's time is going into 'busy work', with only 1/3 spent on true value-add tasks (Liu, 2022).

Busy or shallow work can be defined as "Non-cognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted. These efforts tend not to create much new value in the world and are easy to replicate" (Newport, 2016, p.228).

Busy work is exacerbated by network tools such as email and instant messaging services. By some estimates, the average knowledge worker is interrupted every 3 minutes - and about half are 'self interruptions', for instance, checking email (Gloria Mark, cited in Gallup, 2006).

This constant switching is associated with slower work, more errors and lower levels of creativity (Hari, 2022).

Thriving teams cut back on busy work insofar as possible, so they can focus on the most meaningful work.

Team members connect with beneficiaries

A range of studies by Adam Grant and others has shown that employees work harder and are more effective when they interact with the end users or beneficiaries of their work.

For instance, scholarship fundraisers make more calls and bring in more revenue, after they meet scholarship recipients (Grant, 2011). The human connection really matters - because it highlights *who* the work is being performed for.

“Consistent purpose is not enough to make life happy, but it is an almost indispensable condition of a happy life. And consistent purpose embodies itself mainly in work”
(Russell, 1982, p.168).

Potential

In a thriving team:

People know and work to their strengths

When employees are aware of and able to use their key strengths at work, they will enjoy an increased sense of competence and intrinsic motivation.

(This aligns with self-determination theory, in which intrinsic motivation is a function of *competence*, plus autonomy and relatedness to others.)

According to the research literature, there are proven links between the use of strengths at work and:

- More effective workload management
- Less absenteeism
- Greater flow, vitality, passion and engagement
- Greater employee satisfaction, meaning and commitment
- Increase in organisational productivity, sales and profit

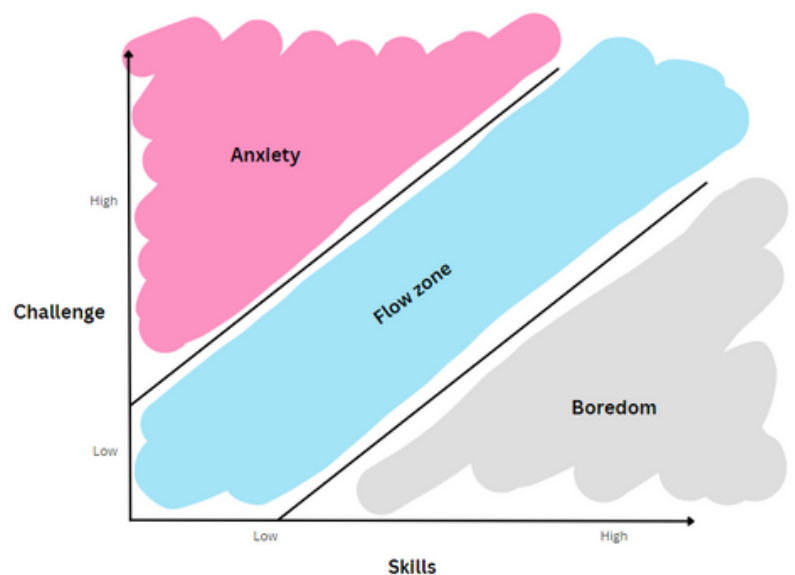
(Miglianico et al, 2020).

People enjoy stretch, flow and growth

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi was a Hungarian-American psychologist, and the author of the influential book 'Flow: The classic work on how to achieve happiness'.

Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as a state of full immersion in an activity, when time seems to fly by. He argues that work can elicit an enjoyable flow state, as people are stretched in a voluntary effort to achieve something worthwhile.

In his words, “The more a job inherently resembles a game – with variety, appropriate and flexible challenges, clear goals, and immediate feedback – the more enjoyable it will be regardless of the worker’s level of development” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p.152). The trick is to operate in the flow zone, in which the level of skill required is well-matched to the level of challenge.



Permission, praise & progress

In a thriving team:

Employees enjoy autonomy

Autonomy refers to the ability to make your own decisions, and in a work context, it's basically the opposite of micromanagement. While leaders or managers may set the goal, employees decide how to achieve it.

Researchers have found that having autonomy or control over the tasks you perform and the pace of work contributes to both job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction (Wheatley, 2017). Similarly, flexibility over the timing and place of work has increased since the Covid-19 pandemic, and workers are appreciating their new-found autonomy.

The flipside is also true - as a lack of autonomy is detrimental to your wellbeing. For instance, in the landmark Whitehall studies, researchers found a lack of job control was associated with an increased risk of heart disease in a cohort of over 10,000 British public servants (Bosma et al, 1997).

“The need for personal control is a basic human drive.”
(Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001, p.181)

Progress is identified and celebrated

Theresa Amabile and colleagues have studied work motivation, and discovered 'the progress principle', that "Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is *making progress in meaningful work*" (Amabile and Kramer, 2011, n.p., emphasis added).

People are praised and valued

Thriving teams typically have strong cultures of appreciation, in which team members thank each other for their efforts and celebrate success (Coyle, 2022).

It's useful to distinguish between:

- praise or positive feedback, which is typically appreciation for specific actions or performances.
- recognition, which is about 'noticing and honoring' a person's broader contribution (Hansen, Smith and Hansen, 2002, p.65).
- rewards, which are typically monetary incentives that people receive as a result of completing a particular activity (ibid). The activity is a means to an end, the reward.

Positive, specific feedback or praise tends to boost our intrinsic motivation to perform a task (Park et al, 2019). Recognition mechanisms - such as long-service or value awards - tends to make us feel appreciated. Monetary rewards or incentives can be motivating, but there's also a risk that they 'crowd out' intrinsic motivation (see Promberger and Marteau, 2013). Therefore, employees could be motivated to complete less pleasant tasks with reward systems, and motivated to keep engaging in intrinsically satisfying tasks via praise and recognition (Hansen, Smith and Hansen, 2002).

Play

In a thriving team:

Workload is sustainable

Workload is a major stressor. According to leading researchers:

- There's a clear link between long hours and burnout (Gallup, 2023).
- Workload is one of the top causes of burnout, and responsible for an excess of 500,000 deaths per year, globally (Moss cited in McKinsey & Company, 2021).
- Unreasonable performance expectations were a key driver of turnover in the Great Resignation (DeSmett et al, 2022).

At the individual level, overwork is associated with stress, mental fatigue, increased risk of stroke and heart disease, and less likelihood of engaging in self care or social activities that are restorative (CALM Business, n.d.).

Thriving teams have sustainable workloads and reasonable hours, which helps to reduce the risk of burnout, turnover and health issues.

"People are not like wet towels to be wrung out. They are not objects from which we can squeeze every last drop of performance."
(Simon Sinek)

People restore their energy, outside of work

One effective way to lift work performance is to have restorative time, outside of work. This has become much harder as we increasingly work from home or in a hybrid set-up, with all-hours access to email on our phone, and a work station within the home. But nevertheless, it's critically important.

People who can detach and recover from work enjoy:

- better physical and mental health, including less exhaustion, better sleep, and better mood
- improved productivity and performance
- enhanced levels of creativity and motivation
- a lift in overall wellbeing and motivation

(Jabr, 2013; Sonnentag et al, 2022; Wendsche and Lohmann-Haislah, 2017)

As one researcher put it, "Downtime replenishes the brain's stores of attention and motivation, encourages productivity and creativity, and is essential to both achieve our highest levels of performance and simply form stable memories in everyday life."
(Jabr, 2013).

Sounds pretty important!

So, how are you going?

You might like to use these reflection questions with your team.

How are we going on each dimension?

What's going well that we should celebrate?

What is our top priority for change?

How might we start to drive change in this area?

- Is there anything we could or should stop doing?
- Are there any small steps we could action right now, to start making things better and to build momentum?

How will we know if we're succeeding? What will be different? Paint 'job done' for me.

I help teams to become happier and high-performing, using this framework as a starting point.

I'd love to support your team - so you can do your best work without burning out.

Get in touch if that's of interest!

Renee Jaime

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