

A photograph of two women in a meeting. On the left, a younger woman with long brown hair and glasses is smiling. On the right, an older woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing an orange dress and a patterned scarf, is also smiling and has her hands clasped. They are in a bright room with large windows and indoor plants.

2023 LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

Thriving *at Work*



Simmons University
Institute for
Inclusive Leadership

Executive Summary

Thriving at work is the antidote to many of the challenges women face at work that have led to the “Great Breakup” “Quiet Quitting” and burnout. In 2023, as part of our ongoing work to 1) support women to arrive and then thrive in leadership, and 2) make it easy for all leaders to support inclusion, we surveyed our Simmons Leadership Conference participants to understand more about how they experience thriving at work. Our findings include:

How Women Thrive

Making a positive contribution, having the opportunity to learn and grow, and being valued and recognized are the most important aspects of thriving at work.

Why Thriving Matters at Work

When thriving at work, employees are more productive, more likely to go “above and beyond,” and more effective.

How Managers Can Ensure a Thriving Culture

Making it safe to take risks, providing opportunities to grow, and giving employees a sense of autonomy about their work are the three most important actions managers can take to support their employees in thriving.

How You Can Ensure You Are Thriving

Building good relationships with colleagues and seeking out opportunities to learn and develop are the two most important ways respondents say they contribute to their own ability to thrive at work. They also set good boundaries between work and home.

“To thrive, people must feel valued. We need to be appropriately compensated, recognized privately and publicly for good work, and treated with respect. We must be given the opportunities to grow and develop, as well as to unplug and refresh.”

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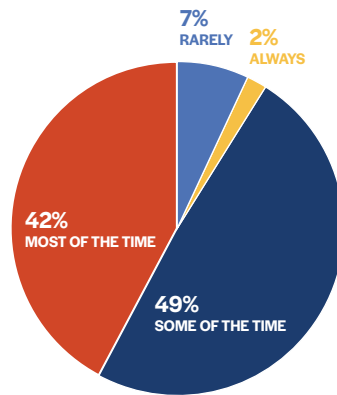
Our Respondents Are Thriving

- Over 90% say they are thriving at work.
- 96% say thriving at work is either extremely or very important.
- 81% believe their organization is committed to supporting their ability to thrive.

When you are at work, how often do you feel like you are thriving?

91% of survey respondents say they thrive at least some of the time. This finding is consistent, regardless of the average number of hours worked or whether they work in the office, remotely, or hybrid.

362 participants from the Simmons Leadership Conference in March of 2023 completed our survey.



Prior researchers have defined **thriving at work** as “a positive psychological state characterized by a joint sense of vitality and learning.”¹ Our findings both validate and provide nuance to this definition.



1) Gretchen Spreitzer, Kathleen Sutcliffe, Jane Dutton, Scott Sonenshein, Adam M. Grant, (2005) A Socially Embedded Model of Thriving at Work. Organization Science 16(5):537-549.

The benefits of thriving at work



Key finding: Employees say that when they are thriving at work, they are more productive, more likely to go “above and beyond,” and more effective.

When employees thrive, the organization benefits

According to our respondents, when they feel they are thriving at work, they are more productive, more likely to go “above and beyond,” and more effective. They also report being more able to do their best work.

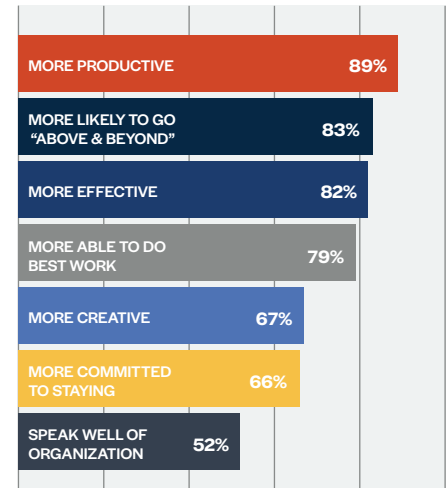
Individuals also benefit

Our respondents also report positive impacts for themselves. The top answers to “When you are thriving at work, how do you feel?” are:

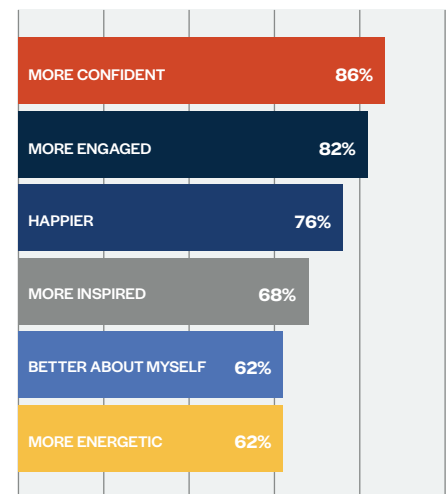
- More confident
- More engaged
- Happier
- More inspired

These positive outcomes reinforce the benefits for organizations to not only talk about thriving, but to also engage in the behaviors needed to allow employees to thrive. In the words of one of the respondents: “Companies do a lot of talking about thriving, but don’t back it up with actions. When push comes to shove, they go for the money. They talk about thriving but then push you to make it difficult to thrive.”

When you feel like you are thriving at work, what is the impact?



When you are thriving at work, how do you feel?



What does thriving at work mean?



Key finding: People report that making a positive contribution, having the opportunity to learn and grow, and being valued and recognized are the most important aspects of thriving at work.

“Thriving at work means I’m learning, growing, have a voice, building meaningful relationships, providing value, as well being valued.”

In analyzing the responses to the question “What does thriving at work mean to you?” three themes rose to the top:

1. Making a positive contribution

This was by far the most common theme, and it included concepts like doing good and meaningful work, providing value, accomplishing goals, making a difference, and having a positive impact.

2. Learning

The second most common theme centered around learning, growth, and the opportunity to develop. Some of our respondents noted that these opportunities were important both for themselves and for their teams.

3. Being valued and recognized

Being recognized, valued and appreciated is the third most common theme of thriving at work. We also saw the importance of being valued and appreciated in our research on [Belonging at Work](#). This suggests that the fundamental human value of being seen and appreciated is a critical component of a positive work environment.

Although these themes rose to the top by a significant margin, other themes included supporting their team, building meaningful relationships, feeling energized, feeling inspired, and having a sense of enjoyment.



These themes are further supported by the answers to the question, “What are the characteristics of your work that allow you to thrive?” The top 3 choices are:

1. I have the opportunity to grow and develop.
2. I have a good manager.
3. I am able to utilize my strengths.

These map quite neatly to the key themes, given that a good manager values and recognizes their team, and using one’s strengths contributes to having a positive impact.

96%

of respondents say thriving at work is either extremely or very important.

Respondents of color are more likely than white respondents to say that thriving at work is extremely important.



Promoting thriving for individuals and organizations



Key findings: Managers can promote thriving by giving employees a sense of autonomy, making it safe for them to take risks, and providing opportunities to learn and develop.

Organizations promote thriving by ensuring sustainable workloads and the ability to use paid time off (PTO).

Individuals promote their own thriving by building strong relationships and seeking out opportunities to learn and develop.

Having a good manager is the second most common answer to the question, “What are the characteristics of your work that allow you to thrive?” just behind “I have the opportunity to grow and develop.” Further underscoring the importance of good managers, ineffective management was the second most common theme in the answers to “What gets in the way of your ability to thrive at work?”

Making it safe for employees to take risks is the most common way managers support the ability to thrive. This is strikingly similar to the importance of manager support for risk taking in the findings from our research on [Healthy Teams in a Hybrid World](#).

Providing a sense of autonomy is the second most common answer to the question, “When you’ve felt like you were thriving at work, how did your manager support you?” Although we didn’t collect data that would allow us to be certain, we hypothesize that the sense of autonomy does two things to support thriving. First, it communicates that the employees’ contributions and skills are valued, and second, it allows employees to manage their workload (see page 9 for more on the importance of workload to thriving).

“A lot of my ability to thrive has to do with my own choices and boundaries. I feel in control of whether I can thrive or not.”



Given the importance of learning and developing in respondents' concept of thriving, it's not surprising that the third most common way managers support thriving is "Gave me opportunities to learn and develop my skills." As we said above, the opportunity to grow and develop is also the top characteristic of work that allows respondents to thrive.

Most respondents say their organization is committed to supporting their ability to thrive at work. 81% of respondents either strongly agree (34%) or somewhat agree (47%) that their organization is committed to supporting their ability to thrive at work. This finding is consistent, regardless of the average number of hours worked or whether they work in the office, remotely, or hybrid.

Commitment is demonstrated through providing resources, supporting the use of PTO, and communication.

When we asked respondents how their organization demonstrates that commitment, the top responses were:

1. They provide resources and tools needed so staff can work in a sustainable way.
2. They support people to use their vacation time and other paid time off.
3. They discuss thriving in organization wide communications.

“Many companies do not think about this enough, which is why so many of us feel burned out and ready to quit.”



Reinforcing the importance of resources and tools, when we asked respondents what gets in the way of their ability to thrive at work, the most common theme was their workload. Responses included “Workload – we run very lean and it is killing morale,” “Not having enough resources,” “Too many priorities and constant change,” and many other similar comments.

Supporting the use of PTO can be seen as a further demonstration of the importance of a manageable workload. We also interpret it as an indicator of an organization that values their employees. We noted that a few respondents included the ability to have time and energy for their personal life in their definitions of thriving. However “I make sure to take my PTO” rated lowest on the list of ways that respondents contributed to their own ability to thrive at work. We don’t interpret this to mean that they don’t value their time off as part of thriving, rather we theorize that respondents include taking PTO as part of larger efforts they rate more highly. These include “I set good boundaries between work and home” and “I take care of my physical and mental wellbeing.”

“Having a manageable workload that mostly allows me to use my strengths is the critical foundation to be able to thrive at work.”



Thriving tools for individuals, managers, and organizations



Key findings: We offer the following tools for supporting thriving at work, whether as an individual, a manager, or on behalf of the organization. These tools are derived from insights gained in this study, suggestions offered by our respondents, and our own expertise.

TOOLS FOR INDIVIDUALS

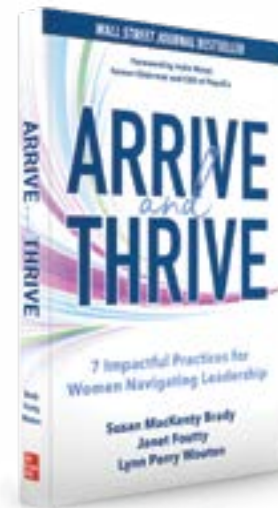
Invest in building relationships with your colleagues. The top answer to “How do you contribute to your ability to thrive at work?” was “I build good relationships with my colleagues.” Take the time to connect with colleagues informally, as well as through joint projects and teamwork.

Engage in the *7 Impactful Practices of Arrive and Thrive*

1. Investing in Your Best Self
2. Embracing Authenticity
3. Cultivating Courage
4. Fostering Resilience
5. Inspiring a Bold Vision
6. Creating a Healthy Team Environment
7. Committing to the Work of the Inclusive Leader™

Be intentional about creating opportunities to learn and develop:

Whether through attending formal programs, or more informal learning like ad hoc stretch assignments and job shadowing, make learning and growth a priority.



Learn more about the practices: arriveandthrive.com

Better Understanding Podcast

It all begins with understanding ourselves and understanding others.

Season two focuses on the practices of Arrive and Thrive, featuring interviews with Whitney Johnson, Sally Helgesen, Masih Alinejad and others.

Set good boundaries between work and personal life, in whatever way works best for you. Think about what would work best for you, communicate those boundaries, and test how they work. Readjust as needed.

Take your PTO: Plan ahead, take time off, and when you do, use the time thoughtfully to disconnect and recharge.

TOOLS FOR MANAGERS

Make it safe for employees to take risks. As we noted above, this was the top answer to the question, “When you’ve felt like you were thriving at work, how did your manager support you?”

We believe that the best way to create safety for risk taking is to invest in your best self. When you lead (and react) from your best self, you will avoid the harshness that can shut down risk taking.

Engage in the six essential actions to foster a healthy team environment:

1. Understand and unleash team member strengths
2. Set team direction and strategy
3. Communicate honestly and convene frequently for service excellence
4. Learn and develop together
5. Make it appreciative
6. Ensure psychological safety

More details on all of these practices can be found in [*Arrive and Thrive*](#).

Check in with your direct reports regularly to ensure they feel they are making positive contributions, they are learning, and they feel valued and recognized.

Support team members to take PTO. Encourage your team members to plan ahead, take time off, and when they do, help them to truly disconnect. In addition, be visible about taking your own time off and setting good boundaries.



TOOLS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Provide resources and tools needed so staff can work in a sustainable way. This is the most critical action cited by our respondents.

Provide sufficient PTO and the structures that allow people to use it. The importance of time to rest and rejuvenate is well established. Giving employees sufficient time is only part of the equation. If the culture doesn't support the use of PTO, whether due to workload or overt or covert messaging, thriving will be significantly inhibited.

Communicate. As we saw from our responses, discussing thriving in organization-wide communications is an important way to support thriving.

Encourage managers to engage in the six essential actions to foster a healthy team environment (see managers section for more details). Provide training and coaching, and measure manager's effectiveness in engaging in these essential actions.

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Susan has previously published two books on leadership. Her third, co-authored by Executive Chair of the Board of Deloitte US Janet Foutty and Simmons University President Dr. Lynn Perry Wooten, *Arrive & Thrive: 7 Impactful Practices for Women Navigating Leadership* (McGraw-Hill), debuted in April 2022 and landed on the best-seller list in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *USA Today*.

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Drawing on her expertise in gender equity and women's leadership, Elisa creates innovative programming that develops the mindset and skills of leaders at all stages of life so they can foster gender parity and cultures of inclusion. Elisa is a co-author of *The Inclusive Leader's Playbook: The Work of the Inclusive Leader*[™] with Susan MacKenty Brady. She is a co-author of several publications, including *The Importance of Belonging in the Workplace* (February 2022) and *The Importance of Authenticity in the Workplace* (July 2021).



ABOUT US

Our mission is to develop the mindset and skills of leaders at all stages of life so they can foster gender parity and cultures of inclusion. We offer research-driven programming for individuals and leadership journeys for entire organizations.

Learn more:

[inclusiveleadership.com](https://www.inclusiveleadership.com)

2023 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

Thriving *at Work*

This comprehensive report explores what it means to thrive at work, and how managers, individuals, and organizations can create circumstances that allow employees to thrive. Based on the results of a survey with over 360 respondents, we provide new insights on the benefits and challenges of fostering thriving at work.



[inclusiveleadership.com](https://www.inclusiveleadership.com)