

Being happy at work is nice, but thriving is better -- and more productive

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(PhysOrg.com) -- While it may come as little surprise that happy employees are more productive, a high-performing workforce needs more than just a feeling of contentment—workers need to thrive, says a researcher at the University of Michigan.

"We think of a thriving [workforce](#) as one in which employees are not just satisfied and productive but also engaged in creating the future—the company's and their own," said Gretchen Spreitzer, professor of management and organizations at the Michigan Ross School of Business. "Thriving employees have a bit of an edge—they are highly energized—but they know how to avoid burnout."

Over the past seven years, Spreitzer and Christine Porath, assistant

professor at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business, have researched the nature of thriving in the workplace and the factors that enhance or inhibit it. They, along with colleagues Cristina Gibson of the University of Western Australia and Flannery Garnett of the University of Utah, have surveyed more than 1,200 white- and blue-collar workers in various industries about [learning](#), growth, personal energy, retention rates, health, overall job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors.

In a new study published in the Harvard Business Review, Spreitzer and Porath found that people who fit their description of thriving demonstrated 16 percent better overall job performance and 125 percent less burnout than their peers. They were 32 percent more committed to the organization and 46 percent more satisfied with their jobs. They also missed much less work and reported significantly fewer doctor visits, which meant health care savings and less lost time for the company.

The researchers identified two components of thriving—vitality and learning.

"Vitality is the sense of being alive, passionate and excited," Spreitzer said. "Employees who experience vitality spark energy in themselves and others. Companies generate vitality by giving people the sense that what they can do on a daily basis makes a difference. Learning is the growth that comes from gaining new knowledge and skills. People who are developing their abilities are likely to believe in their potential for further growth."

Spreitzer and Porath say that the qualities of vitality and learning work in concert—one without the other is unlikely to be sustainable and may even damage performance. For example, people with high energy and high learning were 21 percent more effective as leaders than those with only high energy. Those with high energy and low learning were 54

percent worse when it came to health than those who were high in both.

"The combination of vitality and learning leads to employees who deliver results and find ways to grow," Spreitzer said. "Their work is rewarding not just because they successfully perform what's expected of them today, but also because they have a sense of where they and the company are headed. In short, they are thriving, and the energy they create is contagious."

According to the researchers, managers can employ four measures—each enforcing the other—to promote a culture of vitality and learning, ultimately helping employees thrive at work:

- Provide decision-making discretion—Empowering workers at every level to make decisions gives them a greater sense of control, more say in how things get done and more opportunities for learning.
- Share information—People contribute more effectively when they understand how their work fits with an organization's mission and strategy. Doing your job in a vacuum is tedious and uninspiring; there's no reason to look for innovative solutions if you can't see the larger impact.
- Minimize incivility—Faced with such behavior, [employees](#) are likely to narrow their focus to avoid risks and lose opportunities to learn in the process. Corporate culture is inherently contagious; if you hire for civility, you're more likely to breed it into your culture.
- Offer performance feedback—By resolving feelings of uncertainty, feedback keeps people's work-related activities focused on personal and organizational goals. The quicker and more direct the feedback, the more useful it is.

Provided by University of Michigan

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