

Research on Strategies to Enhance Thriving at Work among New-Generation Employees in Manufacturing Enterprises

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Abstract

This study investigates the enhancement of thriving at work among new-generation employees in manufacturing enterprises. Employing a structured questionnaire survey, an empirical study was conducted with 437 frontline and technical new-generation employees (aged 18 - 32) from four leading manufacturing firms in Shaanxi Province: LONGi Green Energy Technology Co., Ltd., Shaanxi Automobile Holding Group Co., Ltd., Yanchang Petroleum Group, and BYD Company Limited. A model was constructed from an internal management perspective, positioning thriving at work as the dependent variable, with demands-abilities fit, job autonomy, perceived organizational support, and transformational leadership as core independent variables. Analytical methods including reliability analysis, regression analysis, and interaction effect tests were systematically applied to identify key mechanisms influencing thriving at work. To enhance methodological rigor, established measurement scales were contextualized for the manufacturing environment (incorporating production line characteristics and standardized processes) and new-generation employee traits (emphasizing autonomy needs, growth expectations, and digital adaptability). The findings reveal that: demands-abilities fit exerts the strongest influence on thriving at work; increased job autonomy corresponds with elevated levels of thriving at work; enhanced perceived organizational support is associated with greater thriving at work; a transformational leadership style demonstrates a significant positive correlation with thriving at work; and clarity of promotion channels significantly reduces turnover intention. Based on these results, this paper proposes targeted intervention strategies across four dimensions—employee development, job design, organizational systems, and leadership behaviors—tailored to the values and behavioral characteristics of new-generation employees. The study provides empirical evidence and managerial implications for manufacturing enterprises seeking to

effectively “retain, motivate, and utilize talent” within the context of digital transformation.

Keywords

Manufacturing Enterprises, New-Generation Employees, Thriving at Work

1. Introduction

Amidst evolving internal and external environments, manufacturing enterprises are confronting multiple challenges including rising costs, declining product demand, increasing pressure for technological innovation, and diversified customer requirements. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics’ “Seventy-Five Years of New China’s Economic and Social Development Achievements”, China’s average annual industrial value-added growth rate decelerated from the high-speed growth phase to 5.7% between 2013 and 2023. Projections indicate that by 2025, the talent shortage in ten key manufacturing sectors will approach 30 million, with an overall gap rate reaching 48% (Gao & Zhang, 2023). Under the transformation pressure toward “high-end, intelligent, and green” development, manufacturing enterprises urgently require a new generation of technical workers capable of both operating digital equipment and continuously improving processes. Simultaneously, new-generation employees face the dilemma of “high turnover and low engagement”. For manufacturing enterprises, the high turnover rate among new-generation employees brings a series of negative impacts: talent loss not only increases human resource costs but also leads to declining production efficiency.

Thriving at work, as a crucial manifestation of employee work attitude and psychological state, profoundly influences work efficiency, job involvement, and career development. It not only determines employees’ retention intention and creativity but also directly affects corporate productivity, product development, and production cycles. However, characteristic manufacturing working conditions—such as shift work, noisy environments, and strict production rhythms—conflict with the values of new-generation employees who pursue flexibility, autonomy, and rapid growth. This contradiction makes the formation mechanism of thriving at work significantly different from that in industries like internet technology or finance.

Therefore, enabling new-generation employees to maintain “thriving at work”—experiencing both vitality and continuous learning—has become crucial for manufacturing enterprises to enhance competitiveness. This study focuses on the manufacturing context, identifies core factors influencing the thriving at work of new-generation employees, and proposes targeted intervention strategies. This research holds significant practical importance for addressing the manufacturing talent gap and transformation challenges.

2. Conceptual Definitions and Characteristic Analysis

2.1. Definition and Characteristics of New-Generation Employees

2.1.1. Definition of New-Generation Employees

New-generation employees emerged as a distinct research focus in the 1990s, paralleling the conceptual development of “Generation Y” and “Generation Z” in academic discourse. Generation Y typically encompasses individuals born between 1980-1990 or 1980-2000, while Generation Z refers to those born from 1995 to 2009. Chronologically, this demographic corresponds to what is commonly termed the post-95s and post-00s cohorts, whose formative years and growth trajectories have coincided with the advent and evolution of the internet (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). Within the Chinese context, the “new-generation” cohort is generally defined as those socialized within emerging technological environments characterized by internet and computer proliferation. Temporally, new-generation employees are categorized as working professionals from the post-80s, post-90s, and post-00s generations (Yang, 2019).

2.1.2. Work Characteristics of New-Generation Employees

The value systems and professional orientations of new-generation employees manifest distinct temporal signatures. They demonstrate heightened emphasis on career development prospects, growth opportunities, work-life balance, and meaningful work engagement. Beyond conventional compensation and positional considerations, they place greater value on independent thinking and value creation through work, while prioritizing collaborative teamwork and knowledge sharing. Their behavioral patterns present a dualistic combination of positive and negative attributes. On one hand, they exhibit strong orientation toward innovation and autonomy, demonstrating considerable dedication to endeavors they find personally meaningful. Conversely, their heightened emphasis on individual expression correlates with relatively lower levels of organizational loyalty and job satisfaction. While typically possessing strong technical capabilities, they frequently demonstrate limited patience and comparatively underdeveloped communication and collaborative skills.

Significant intergenerational distinctions emerge when comparing post-90s and post-00s new-generation employees with traditional employees from the 60s, 70s, and 80s cohorts. Older generational cohorts tend to uphold collectivist values, demonstrating willingness to subordinate individual interests to collective goals, prioritizing interpersonal relationship maintenance, and exhibiting strong adherence to established rules and organizational commitment. In contrast, new-generation employees emphasize personal value realization, pursue work-life equilibrium, demonstrate relatively attenuated collective honor awareness, and approach authority structures and regulatory frameworks with heightened critical consciousness, frequently challenging and transcending established paradigms.

2.2. Origins and Conceptualization of Thriving at Work

Academic investigation of thriving traces to mid-20th century psychological re-

search, where “thriving” was conceptualized as representing positive psychological development. The specific construct of “thriving at work” was formally established by Spreitzer in 2005, defined as a psychological state wherein individuals simultaneously experience both “vitality” and “learning” in their work environments (Spreitzer et al., 2005; Zheng & Lu, 2013). Thriving at work characterizes an individual’s affective and cognitive experiences within occupational settings. Conceptualized as a malleable state rather than a fixed trait, it demonstrates particular sensitivity to situational work factors and contextual environmental influences. While subject to temporal fluctuation, thriving at work nevertheless exhibits longitudinal continuity across the individual career trajectory.

Both constitutive dimensions of thriving at work—vitality and learning—are fundamentally embedded within social systems. Vitality typically emerges through interpersonal connections within social networks, while individual development is facilitated through interactions across diverse social groupings (Wang, Li & Fan, 2022). Similarly, workplace learning occurs through social engagement, encompassing collaborative discussion of work-related content, interpersonal communication, and observational learning through colleague interactions.

Thriving at work enables synchronization between personal development and work progression, facilitating task accomplishment while simultaneously promoting individual growth. It serves as a self-evaluation metric for assessing whether occupational efforts yield near-term and long-term competency enhancement. Furthermore, as a positive psychological state, thriving at work contributes to improved psychological and physiological well-being. When individuals experience enhanced vitality and energy in work contexts, concomitant reductions in anxiety and depression frequently occur, thereby supporting overall mental health.

3. Analysis of Factors Influencing Thriving at Work among New-Generation Employees in Manufacturing Enterprises

3.1. Determination of Indicators

To systematically identify key factors affecting thriving at work among new-generation employees in manufacturing enterprises, this study employed a structured

Table 1. Scale source and reliability test results (N = 437).

Variable	Source Literature	Number of items	Cronbach’s α
Thriving at work (Simplified version)	Porath et al. (2012)	10	0.88
Demands-Abilities Fit	Cable & DeRue (2002)	5	0.86
Job Decision Latitude	Karasek Jr. (1979) (Decision Latitude-Decision Authority)	3	0.78
Perceived Organizational Support (Short Version)	Ling et al. (2006)	10	0.95
Transformational Leadership (Selected Dimensions from the MLQ-5X)	Bass & Avolio (1995)	6	0.90

questionnaire survey for data collection. The questionnaire design was based on established scales from both domestic and international literature, appropriately adapted to account for manufacturing work contexts and new-generation employee characteristics. All scales utilized a 5-point Likert rating system (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The reliability indices for all measurement tools met or exceeded the recommended threshold in psychological research (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$), demonstrating satisfactory internal consistency. The sources and reliability coefficients of each scale are detailed in **Table 1**.

3.2. Survey Data Analysis

This study conducted questionnaire surveys from June to August 2025 among frontline and technical new-generation employees (aged 18 - 32) from four leading manufacturing enterprises in Shaanxi Province: LONGi Green Energy Technology Co., Ltd., Shaanxi Automobile Holding Group Co., Ltd., Yanchang Petroleum Group, and BYD Company Limited. A total of 486 electronic questionnaires were distributed, with 437 valid responses collected (effective response rate: 89.9%). All data were analyzed using SPSS 29.0 for descriptive statistics, regression, and interaction effect tests. Qualitative results were utilized to interpret and supplement quantitative findings, ensuring the robustness and replicability of the research conclusions. The specific findings are as follows:

3.2.1. Individual Factors

Using the mean scores of the 5-item "Person-Job Fit Scale" for grouping: the high-fit group (≥ 5 points) demonstrated a thriving at work mean score of 5.72, while the low-fit group (≤ 3 points) scored only 4.35 ($\Delta = 1.37$, Cohen's $d = 0.82$). The correlation coefficient between promotion channel clarity (single item: "My work provides me with the resources and opportunities necessary for advancement and development.") and thriving at work was 0.46 ($p < 0.001$). In enterprises with "clearly defined technical promotion ladders," the one-year turnover rate among new-generation employees was 7.8%, compared to 17.4% in enterprises without such ladders ($\chi^2 = 11.42$, $p < 0.01$).

These results indicate that when employees' competencies align highly with job requirements, they can stimulate greater interest in their work, guided by self-actualization needs, thereby experiencing enhanced work accomplishment and self-efficacy. Conversely, person-job misfit reduces thriving at work. When employees perceive that the enterprise provides favorable career development opportunities, they exhibit increased confidence and patience at work, anticipating accelerated enterprise growth, consequently enhancing their thriving at work. Enterprises must prioritize employees' career development needs and provide advancement opportunities to improve thriving at work.

3.2.2. Job Characteristic Factors

Using the "number of autonomous decision-making items on the production line" as a count variable: for each additional autonomous decision (e.g., tool re-

placement, adjustment of quality sampling frequency), thriving at work increased by 0.18 ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$).

When employees possess greater autonomy and decision-making authority, they can flexibly arrange work based on their own capabilities and experience, fostering increased autonomy and accomplishment, thereby enhancing thriving at work. Conversely, lack of job control leads to work burnout and reduces thriving at work. Enterprises should appropriately delegate job control, granting employees greater autonomy and creativity.

3.2.3. Organizational Factors

a) Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

For each 1-point increase in POS, thriving at work increased by 0.41 ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$). Among the sub-dimensions, “training support” and “welfare fairness” had standardized coefficients of 0.28 and 0.22 ($p < 0.01$), respectively, on thriving at work. In the sample receiving ≥ 3 training sessions annually, the mean thriving at work score was 5.79, higher than the 4.93 in the group with ≤ 1 training session ($\Delta = 0.86$).

When employees perceive organizational care and support, they demonstrate greater recognition of company culture and systems. Specific manifestations of organizational support include humanized corporate culture, quality training opportunities, clear promotion channels, and generous benefits. For instance, a positive corporate culture can influence employees’ work attitudes and behaviors, allowing them to perceive the enterprise’s vitality and cohesion, thereby enhancing thriving at work. Higher employee recognition of organizational support correlates with stronger thriving at work (Liu & Li, 2020). Enterprises should provide care and support to employees, enabling them to perceive cohesion, enhance perceived organizational support, recognize corporate culture, and consequently strengthen thriving at work.

b) Leadership Style

The correlation coefficient between the transformational leadership scale score and thriving at work reached 0.53 ($p < 0.001$). Among the sub-dimensions, “individualized consideration” had the greatest impact on technical staff ($\beta = 0.36$), while “inspirational motivation” most significantly affected general workers ($\beta = 0.30$).

Both supportive and challenging leader behaviors can promote employee thriving at work (Li & Tao, 2024), indicating that leadership style significantly influences thriving at work. Transformational leadership, through leading by example, inspires employees to pursue higher goals, provides individualized consideration, and offers intellectual stimulation, significantly enhancing employee thriving at work. Transactional leadership, through clear reward-punishment mechanisms and performance orientation, acknowledges each employee contribution, using incentive systems as work guidance; however, overreliance may lead to a lack of long-term strategic vision among employees. Positive interactions between leaders and employees strengthen employees’ sense of belonging and identification,

enhancing work motivation. Enterprises should select appropriate leadership styles based on industry characteristics and job nature, utilizing effective leadership behaviors to improve thriving at work.

4. Four Action Strategies to Enhance Thriving at Work among New-Generation Employees in Manufacturing Enterprises

Based on the preceding analysis of factors influencing thriving at work among new-generation employees in manufacturing, this study proposes enhancement strategies tailored to their characteristics.

4.1. Empowering Growth

Enterprises should develop “from-onboarding-to-mastery” skill maps for new-generation employees, deconstructing each operational procedure into star-rated micro-competency units. This system should integrate online challenge-based learning platforms with offline practical competition mechanisms, implementing a biannual tournament structure where competition outcomes are directly linked to professional certification. High performers should receive immediate salary adjustments or accelerated grade promotions. Concurrently, competition data and skill acquisition metrics should be integrated into HR systems to generate visualized growth portfolios, enabling employees to monitor their “experience bar” and “skill tree” progression in real-time through mobile interfaces. This design transforms conventionally monotonous repetitive tasks into quantifiable gaming-like “leveling up” experiences, thereby addressing new-generation employees’ need for rapid achievement recognition while simultaneously building a pipeline of highly-skilled talent for the organization.

4.2. Delegating Authority to Activate Potential

A rotating “Youth Section Chief” system should be implemented on production lines, enabling post-95s and post-00s employees to serve monthly as “micro-workshop supervisors.” These rotating supervisors are granted three substantive authorities: process parameter fine-tuning, team shift scheduling recommendations, and material requisition approval. Regular team leaders assume solely coaching roles, providing professional guidance rather than direct supervision. Upon completion of each rotation, a debriefing roadshow is convened where participants deliver three-minute TED-style presentations demonstrating their improvement achievements. Colleagues and management engage in real-time QR-code voting, with the best proposal receiving a designated bonus within the same month and being documented in their personnel files. This approach systematically amplifies new-generation employees’ sense of ownership, mitigates resistance to top-down directives, and stimulates intrinsic motivation for proactive innovation.

4.3. Cultivating Cultural Resonance

A dedicated short-video platform should be established to encourage employees

to document workplace highlights through Vlogs, such as “A Day on My Production Line,” “Instant Troubleshooting Techniques,” and “Zero-Defect Quality Insights.” Engagement metrics—including likes, shares, and interactive comments—should be automatically converted into cultural credits redeemable for rewards such as paid leave, external training opportunities, or exclusive event access. A quarterly “Top Streamer” recognition program should feature homepage spotlighting, customized workstation honor badges, and personalized uniforms, providing idol-level treatment. This approach transforms cultural recognition into tangible, shareable, and monetizable experiences, effectively transitioning corporate culture from static wall slogans to dynamic digital engagement.

4.4. Transforming Leadership

Frontline supervisors should be enrolled in intensive “Leader as Coach” training programs focusing on the GROW model, nonviolent communication techniques, and immediate feedback methodologies. Upon completion, participants must sign a “Weekly Commitment Pledge” requiring them to conduct minimum five-minute walking tutorials with each subordinate, replacing directives with guided questioning and generic criticism with specific recognition. The HR department should implement random QR-code-based audits of coaching records and employee satisfaction metrics. Supervisors failing three consecutive assessments would have their promotion eligibility suspended, compelling managers to transition from “task dispatchers” to “growth coaches.” This systematic approach enables new-generation employees to sustainably generate thriving at work through experiences of being respected and valued.

5. Conclusion

In summary, based on 437 valid samples from manufacturing new-generation employees, this study systematically validates the influence mechanisms of internal management factors on their thriving at work. The research demonstrates that: demands-abilities fit forms the foundation, job autonomy acts as the catalyst, organizational support provides the safeguard, and transformational leadership serves as the amplifier. These four elements synergistically and significantly predict employee thriving levels. Particularly amid digital transformation, new-generation employees’ needs for “visible growth”, “decision-making participation”, and “leader empathy” substantially exceed those of traditional generations. Enterprises persisting with “command-and-control” management models will inevitably exacerbate talent attrition risks.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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