How to Enable Thriving at Work through Organizational Trust

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Abstract
Positive organizational scholarship has gained attention in recent years which emphasizes investing in employee strengths. Review of relevant literature gave some insights on the relationship between organizational climate, inter-individual relationships and thriving at work. This study examines the impact of organizational trust on thriving at work quantitatively. Data was obtained from sample of academicians all over Turkey (n=422) participated to cross-sectional survey study stating their trust to management, supervisor, colleagues and their thriving at work. The structural equation modelling results showed a strong positive relationship between organizational trust and thriving at work (β=.74). Also, it was the first time thriving at work scale has been assessed in Turkey. The validity and reliability scores indicate its usability in Turkish literature.

Keywords: Thriving at work, vitality, learning, organizational trust, positive relationships.

JEL classification: D23, M12

Introduction
Recent studies in the organizational behavior field have revealed that resource understanding of organizations and needs has shifted from financial and physical resources to psychological, intellectual and lately the talents of employees (Colvin, 2008). On the other side, today’s employees expect from companies to present environment offering opportunities for personal growth (Koçak, 2014), otherwise they would not consider a long-term career in that organization (Islam, Cheong, Yusuf, Desa, 2011). In addition, recent positive psychology research (Seligman, 2000), positive organizational scholarship research (Cameron, Dutton and Quinn, 2003) and positive organizational behavior research (Luthans, 2002; Wright, 2003) has initiated positive experiences studies. Positive work relationships has become a central point for studies of work context (Quinn and Dutton, 2005). Additionally, high quality connections of two people is known to be leading vitality and energy for each parties and also others in the environment (Quinn, 2007).

Considering these issues, Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein and Grant (2005) has established a concept, namely thriving at work, which has received attention especially in literature of the positive
organizational scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003). According to Spreitzer et al. (2005), thriving at work is defined as the joint experience of learning and vitality. Learning refers to one’s acquisition of new knowledge and skills which could be obviously seen through applications (Dweck, 1986). Vitality signifies positive emotions together with energy and enthusiasm available (Ryan and Frederick, 1997; Nix, Ryan, Manly and Deci, 1999). More, individuals feel progress and momentum at work when they thrive. Studies show that both of experiencing these psychological states at work simultaneously has some positive outcomes for both organizations and individuals (Keyes, 2002; Sonnenshein, Dutton, Grant, 2005; Carmeli and Spreitzer, 2009; Spreitzer, Porath and Gibson, 2012; Spreitzer and Porath, 2012; Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson and Garnett, 2012; Geiger, 2013; Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens and Smith, 2013; Paterson, Luthans and Jeung, 2014).

Spreitzer et al. (2005) have conceptualized “the socially embedded model of thriving at work” by stating the both context and individual antecedents. According to model, climate of respect and trust are of crucial antecedents. However, in literature, the relationship between thriving at work and trust has been examined in only one study, and in that study authors embraced only trust to supervisor (Carmeli and Spreitzer, 2009). In organizational behavior, recognition of psychological safety (similar to trust) for learning processes (Edmondson, 1999, 2003; Kahn, 1990; Zhang, Fang, Wei, Chen, 2010; Siemsen, Roth, Balasubramanian and Anand, 2008) and vitality (Kark and Carmeli, 2009) has already been came up. Thus, in this study, it is argued that whether three types of trust -trust to management, supervisor and colleagues- separately promote thriving at work.

**Literature Review**

**Organizational Trust and Thriving at Work**

Thriving is shortly and conceptually reflected as that when people are thriving at work, progress and momentum is felt while working (Carmeli and Spreitzer, 2009). Additionally, thriving is not only keeping the psychological state in which we are, but also growing and feeling the progress (Warr, 1990). Definition of thriving at work is shortly is the experience by which sense of learning and sense of vitality is felt simultaneously (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Briefly, sense of learning refers to betterness at tasks at work and vitality refers to being energized, willing and alive at work (Porath, et al., 2012). Vitality has been known as an affective experience (Ryan and Frederick, 1997) and encircles excitement, enthusiasm, vigor and doing things whole-heartedly. Further, as its extreme mean it is living the life as an adventure and activated (Kark, Carmeli, 2009). Psychologically, vitality brings meaning and purpose for one’s own actions (Ryan and Bernstein, 2004). However, jitter, fury or anger which are negative affectivity are not in parallel with subjective vitality (Ryan and Frederick, 1997). According to Russell’s (1980) Circumplex Model of Affect, vitality is stated as a positive affect and high arousal. If one of these dimensions (learning and vitality) is not experienced, thriving is not said to be occurred. When employees continue learning with a depleted energy, this may cause burnout instead of thriving (Geiger, 2013; Spreitzer and Porath, 2012). In a similar vein, a working employee who is full of sense of vitality cannot be experiencing thriving at work if the learning component is missing (Spreitzer, 2005). Because these dimensions (learning and vitality) comprehend both cognitive and affective dimensions of personal growth.

Thriving employees are closely interested in their self-progress (Porath et al., 2012) and this is parallel with Rogers’s (1961) and Ryff’s (1989) definition of personal growth. Ryff (1989) states that people who are growing, know and recognize themselves better and see themselves more beneficial to their environment. By taking this into consideration, according to Porath et al., (2012) thriving can be a gauge for personal growth such that employees can measure via learning and vitality levels. Besides, thriving may not be a lasting experience or for every activity. Finally, thriving level may be different for each employee (Sonenshein et al., 2013).

In order to obtain the positive outcomes, Spreitzer et al. (2005) model of thriving at work also proposes some antecedents depending on contextual features, resources produced in the doing of work and agentic
work behaviors. Contextual features states the prominent way that work is done and include the way of decision making, information sharing, and extent to which interactions between organization members are infused with trust and respect.

Agentic working behaviors mean that the degree of which individuals have a task focus, explore new ways of working, boost their learning, and relate with others heedfully in their work context. Resources produced in the doing of work is consist of knowledge, positive meaning, positive affection, relational resources which help to guide action. These are renewable also an outcome of individual thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005). In their later study, Spreitzer et al. (2012) stated organizational enablers of thriving at work such as more decision making discretion, more information about the organization and its strategies, minimizing incivility, providing performance feedback, and promoting diversity.

Trust refers to "one's expectations, assumptions, or beliefs about another's actions are useful, helpful and positive or at least not endamaging" (Robinson, 1996). In addition, Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt and Camerer (1998) defines trust as "willingness of a part to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on positive expectations regarding the other party's motivation and/or behavior". Often, definitions of trust include "vulnerability", "uncertainty", "risk". According to Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard and Werner (1998), trust to another party reflects the belief that another party will act in good faith, one who trust do not force trustee to meet the expectation and trust is an interdependence phenomenon so that one party's results affects another. Organizational trust is examined in three dimensions: (i) Trust to management, (ii) Trust to Supervisor and (iii) Trust to Colleagues.

Trust to management refers to the employee perceptions which are associated with the support provided by organization, and a reliance that organizations actions will be beneficial or at least not detrimental for employee (Gambetta, 1988). Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis and Winograd (2000) defines trust as expectations from relationships and behaviors inside organization. Trust to management is a base for all vertical and horizontal intra-organizational relationships (Demircan and Ceylan, 2003). Also, rather than focusing interpersonal level, it focuses on the organization itself. Trust to management is found to be related with sense of valuableness (Tan and Tan, 2000); organizational commitment, interpersonal relationships and performance, intention to quit (Gilbert and Tang, 1995; Bateman and Strasse, 1984; Konovsky and Cropanzano, 1991), and employee motivation (Brockner, Daly, Martin, Siegel and Tyler, 1997; Tyler, 2003).

Trust to supervisor refers to subordinate's perception that supervisor is honest, have enough competence, helpful and show concerning behaviors (Yeatts and Hyten, 1998; Larson and LaFasto, 1989). Subordinates believe that supervisor's decisions, behaviors will be beneficial for him/her (Tan and Tan, 2000). According to Whitener et al., (1998), trust process between subordinates and supervisor should be triggered by supervisor. Both written and verbal statements of supervisors taken on a crucial role. However, trust to supervisor may affect the trust to management (Özdağlı and Yücel, 2010) due to supervisors' representation role to the organization management (Konovsky and Pugh, 1994). Trust to supervisor is required for especially those have complicated works and need cooperation and information sharing (Creed and Miles, 1996). It is found that it is linked with organizational citizenship behavior (Deluga, 1995). Employees who do not trust to supervisor is expected to focus only their own tasks which leads to decreased creativity (Sonnenberg, 1994).

Trust to Colleague is defined as an employee’s belief on that his/her colleagues have competence to do the job and are righteous, ethical and reliable (Cook and Wall, 1980; Mayer, Davis, Schoorman, 1995). Thus, one who trusts to colleagues is expected to be certain about that his/her colleagues will share and/or distort information, will not spread gossip, and abuse his/her (Ferres, Connell and Travalione, 2004; Sonnenberg, 1994). Research findings show that in a context where employees trust to each other revealed more commitment to teamworks, easily articulation of problems (Derin, 2011).

Trusting relationships is known to make people easier to set out to a behavior without fearing from consequences due to the belief that criticisms of trustees will be constructive and in a kind way (Kahn, 1990). This belief signifies trusting relationship can decrease the concerns about potential negative consequences of behaviors. Hence, individuals tend to act in their way and even they make mistake trusting environment may facilitate their learning from failures. It can be postulated that in a more trusting
environment employees can establish satisfying feelings to speak up. This leads to expressing emotions, having open and generative conversations, being recognized and being participative. These employees are more likely to engage in learning behaviors (Carmeli et al., 2009). Employees can advance and grasp both their own and others’ point of view, and detect organizational signals better and increase their own cognitive capacities (learning).

According to Ryan and Frederick (1997), social climates which are positive and have high quality connections may increase vitality. In such work environments it can be easily said that trust is one of indicator of high quality connections. It is claimed that interpersonal connections are the underlying mechanism for energizing employees due to its structure of giving employees “sense of being eager to act and capable of action” (Dutton, 2003, 6). This is consistent with trust’s definition (Rousseau et al., 1998). Thus, under favour of trust, which is an indicator of high quality connections, vitality is expected to increase. Moreover, socially embedded model of thriving at work by Spreitzer et al. (2005) states some antecedents of thriving and some of them are directly or indirectly related with trust phenomenon. Firstly, climate of trust and respect is one of obvious antecedent. Secondly, the broad information sharing may be shown up due to trust climate. It is known that when individuals have trust to another (colleague, supervisor etc.), they tend to share information easily (Szulanski, Cappetta and Jensen, 2004; Carley, 1991; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). When individuals’ trust rises, they become available and be open to share information with others (Yang, Mossholder and Peng, 2009). Thus, sharing gets broaden (McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer 2003). Shared information may lead to gaining more knowledge. Also, according to Brown and Duguid (1991), learning, one of the component of thriving at work, occurs in social interactions such as talking about work which requires even a little level of trust. This is the point that learning is expected to increase. Trust to management is further crucial for employees thriving at work because it includes the issues of HR strategies, employee-supporting systems, culture and perception on management’s general view. It is stated that as the decision-making discretion increases, thriving at work is likely to increasingly occur (Spreitzer et al, 2005). Also, resources (skill utilization, autonomy, feedback, career opportunities) provided to employee and demands (workload and emotional demands) are results of management strategies and it is stated that when both resources and demands are high, employees are likely to endorse positive attitudes to work, and may thrive (Bakker, van Veldhoven, Xanthopoulou, 2010). Culture can also be a contributor here which promote exploration, innovation, justice, fair, diversity and respect. According to Spreitzer et al. (2012), these strategies, relational resources and positive culture affects contributes to employees thriving at work creating more vital and learning environment.

In the thriving at work model of Spreitzer et al. (2005), agentic work behaviors are discussed as antecedents of thriving which involves exploration and heedful relating. According to model, exploration includes experimentation, taking risks, innovation and discovery behaviors and they facilitate people to grow in novel directions (Button and Matthieu, Zajac, 1996). The second notion in the model is heedfully relating which is known to promote affective and physiological energy (Carlson, Charlin and Miller, 1988; Brown, Nesse and Vinokur, 2003). Heedfully relating also fosters learning via the Social-Cognitive Learning Theory (Rotter, 1954; Bandura, 1962, Bandura, 1977) which refers to individuals attend to what their colleagues are doing and likely to learn from observing.

Finally, Spreitzer et al., (2012) argues that organizations can enable thriving by minimizing incivility which refers to minimizing inconsiderate, rude words and deeds that violate conventional rules of conduct. A trusting environment may lead courtesy given that employees are less likely to face with negative responds. This may increase their zest and contentment which arise vitality. Minimizing incivility also facilitates learning such that when incivility increases, asking questions to each other, talking about work, and other social interactions are expected to be low which reduces learning and vice a versa. This is also consistent with the previous literature which states that incivility is positively related to interpersonal conflicts (Penny and Spector, 2005; Porath and Erez, 2007; Porath and Pearson, 2009). Thus, minimizing incivility is expected to contribute to both learning and vitality components of thriving.

Research and Methodology

Research Goal and Model
The aim of this research is to demonstrate what extent does an employee’s trust in organization affects his/her thriving at work. Organizational trust is conceptualized with trust to management, trust to supervisor and trust to colleagues (İslamoğlu et al., 2007) while thriving at work is conceptualized as joint experience of vitality and learning (Spreizer et al., 2005).

As a result, as shown in the Figure 1, organizational trust is expected to facilitate employee’s thriving at work. Thus it is hypothesized that

\[ H_1: \text{Organizational trust has an impact on thriving at work.} \]

**Respondents and Data Collection**

Empirical data were collected from faculty of universities of Turkey using an online survey with a convenience sampling method. The questionnaire consisted of four parts and each include one variable and demographics. Additionally, a brief introduction of aim of the study, a full confidentiality guarantee and delivery of the results upon request is given in the front-page of questionnaire. All respondents held positions in universities including research assistants to full professors. Four hundred twenty-two respondents filled out the whole survey. Sixty-one per cent were male and average age was 39.64 years (s.d. 10.14). Percentages according to positions is that: Research assistants 29,4%; lecturers 11,8%; assistant professors 25,6%; associate professors 16,8% and full professors 16,4%.

**Measures**

*Thriving at work* was measured with 8 items selected from the scale developed by Porath et al. (2012). Items were selected depending on corrected item total correlation values for both dimensions. The translation of the scale has been made by a committee comprised of organizational behavior Phd. students in trust of a professor. The scale exhibited a high composite reliability and validity (Composite Reliability: .86; AVE: .75). Sample items include “I find myself learning often” for learning dimension and “I feel alive and vital” for vitality dimension. A six-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 6=strongly agree was applied.

*Organizational Trust* was measured with four items for each dimension from twenty-nine items scale developed by İslamoğlu, Birsel and Börü (2007) which consist of three dimensions: trust to management,
trust to supervisor and trust to colleagues. The scale exhibited a high construct reliability and validity for both first and second order construct (Construct Reliability of 1st order ranged from .96 to .98 and 2nd order was .87; AVE for 1st orders ranged from .73 to .82; 2nd order was .69). Sample items include “My organization gives importance to recruitment and orientation policies” for trust to management, “My colleagues do not exploit other employees” for trust to colleagues and “My supervisor is just and fair.” for trust to supervisor dimension. Responses were made on a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 6=strongly agree.

Analysis and Results

Research model presented in Figure 1 was tested via performing structural equation modelling (SEM) (Bollen, 1989) using the software of AMOS 21 (Arbuckle, 2012). Model fit was assessed with several goodness-of-fit indices. These are Chi-Square statistics divided by the degree of freedom (x2/df); comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis coefficient (TLI), Goodness of fit index (GFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1993; Kline, 1998).

Findings

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for the research variables are shown in Table 1. The bivariate correlations indicate that all variables are inter-correlated around low and middle levels.

| Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations (s.d.) and Correlations |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Age          | 39.64           | 10.15           | 2               | 3               | 4               | 5               |
| 2. Vitality     | 3.18            | 1.22            | .220            |                |                |                |
| 3. Learning     | 3.93            | 1.20            | .117            | .674           |                |                |
| 4. Trust to Management | 2.95    | 1.16            | .164            | .618           | .516**         |                |
| 5. Trust to Colleagues | 3.00    | 1.22            | .106            | .518           | .436           | .735           |
| 6. Trust to Supervisor | 3.41   | 1.50            | .070            | .493           | .413           | .678           | .620           |
| n=422 **p<.01  |                |                |                |                |                |                |

Measurement Model

Before testing the hypotheses, reliability and construct validity scores are examined to ensure the appropriateness of the research instrument. Fornell’s composite reliability (CR) is used for reliability of the measurement models (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Construct validity is examined via convergent and discriminant validity (Chin, Gopal, & Salisbury, 1997). Convergent validity is assessed by examining the item loadings and their associated t-values. All of the indicators must be greater than 0.50 (Wixom and Watson, 2001), indicating that convergent validity has been achieved. Because of a low t-value, standardized loadings, and average variance extracted (AVE) scores, the risk probability indicator was deleted and other constructs were reanalyzed. Table 2 shows factor loadings, t-values, Fornell’s composite reliability scores, and AVE and indicates adequate internal consistency.

Preliminary Analysis

The results of the overall Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and the goodness–of-fit statistics shows that the data fits well to the model (x2 of 316,644 on 164 degrees of freedom p<.000; CMIN/DF: 1.931; CFI:.984; GFI:.931; TLI:.981; RMSEA:.047; SRMR:.025). The items loadings are between .51 to .97. Results of the CFA indicates that each indicator variable and its respective variable is related (p<.01). These results prove relationships among indicators and constructs, and thus, convergent validity (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

Test of the Model
The structural model is evaluated using standardized path coefficients, their significance level (t-statistic), and R2 estimates. Table 3 reports the results of the structural model. The R2s of thriving at work is 0.55, which indicate that the exogenous variable organizational trust explains more than %50 of the variance of thriving at work. R2 values are greater than the recommended value of 0.10 (Falk & Miller, 1992).

Table 3: Hypothesis Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Hypothesis</th>
<th>Path Coefficient</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Trust -&gt; Thriving at Work</td>
<td>0.743</td>
<td>10,380</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All loadings are significant at level p < 0.001 with a 2,000 sample bootstrapping procedure.
Discussion and Conclusions

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of trust in employee's thriving at work. The findings show that organizational trust consist of trust to management, colleagues and supervisor is positively associated with thriving at work. Thus the hypothesis is proved.

These findings suggest the importance of interpersonal relationships enabling employee’s thriving at work. As the previous research has shown the importance of high quality relationships’ association with thriving at work (Dutton, 2003), this study contributes to trust-specific literature. It was known that positive social climate in organization facilitates the thriving, in addition, this study come up with a specific phenomenon of organizational trust. Thus, it has contributions to a unique line of research of high quality relationships.

Furthermore, in parallel with the recent literature, the findings support the notion that employee vitality and learning in enhanced by perception of interpersonal positive climate (Quinn and Dutton, 2005). Additionally, these findings address to effect of social factors on affection, such that when employees think that they are not going to damaged, they are likely to engage in learning activities with a high vitality. They may feel free to come up with a new idea and energized; each of trusting sides gain new ideas. These undoubtedly leads to innovation, creative works (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller and Staw, 2005; and being one-step further in the competition.

Several limitations constraints the interpretation and generalizability of this study. The data is collected at one point of time. Causal direction is not available with this kind of research design. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies should use longitudinal or experience sampling methods in order to examine causal and exact relations between study variables. In addition, single-source-data usage may cause common method errors but due to the structure of concepts, as they are intrinsic and feelings, self-reports may be quite useful. Organizational trust has sometimes measured in a dyadic relationship. The same model should be tested with dyadic sample structure in order to generalize more easily, and therefore decrease the possibility of common method bias.

Future researches should take dimensions of constructs into consideration in order to understand the relationships in detail. This data was fit better with second order construct but another model specification considering first order relationships may result better. Although it is known which dimension of trust have more weight in variance of organizational trust, according to our results it is not clear which of the trusts affect most each dimension of thriving at work.

Additionally, some similar constructs such as psychological safety should be taken into account as meso-level variable. Using multilevel structural equation in which individuals nested in teams may shed light on the mechanism that if organizational trust leads to psychological safety.

This study suggests that each feeling of trust to management, colleagues and supervisor directly affect employees’ thriving at work. These findings obviously underline the need that managers should take interpersonal work context into consideration due to its crucial results: Feelings of vitality and learning, and eventually employees’ thriving at work.

References


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