




Understanding Workplace Flourishing: Insights from South African Employees

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ABSTRACT

In today's high-pressure and fast-paced working environments, employees are not just seeking to survive, but they want to flourish. This study investigated workplace flourishing among South African employees by examining emotional, psychological and social well-being as dimensions of optimal functioning. Grounded in PERMA, the study addressed a gap in understanding how flourishing manifests in developing country contexts, particularly within the South African public sector. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was employed, with data collected from 394 employed individuals within the Free State province. The results revealed high levels of flourishing, where employees frequently reported positive emotions, strong job satisfaction, and low negative affect. Psychological well-being aspects (i.e. autonomy, competence, meaning and engagement) were also consistently strong. Similarly, social well-being results reflected a sense of inclusion, community and social contribution. The findings suggest that employees are capable of experiencing meaning, connection, and personal growth within their work. These insights underline the value of intentionally cultivating environments that support holistic employee well-being. The study offers practical recommendations for fostering flourishing through supportive leadership, growth opportunities and emotionally intelligent organisational cultures. It further contributes to the broader literature on positive organisational behaviour and provides a framework for sustainable employee well-being in the South African context.

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INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by economic uncertainty, organisational change, and increasing psychosocial demands, the well-being of employees has emerged as a central concern in workplace research and practice. While much of the literature has focused on alleviating workplace stress and preventing burnout, a growing body of research anchored in the field of positive psychology emphasises the importance of enabling individuals not merely to survive, but to flourish.¹ Workplace flourishing, in this context, represents an optimal state

¹ Martin E P Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being* (Simon and Schuster, 2011); Barbara L Fredrickson, "The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions.," *American Psychologist* 56, no. 3 (2001): 218; Rethabile N. Tigedi, Freda Van der Walt, and Mpho P. Nyetanyane, "Workplace Spirituality and Its Relevance to Workplace Flourishing," *SA Journal of Human Resource Management* 22 (November 6, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v22i0.2698>.

of employee functioning, marked by high levels of emotional, psychological, and social well-being.² Flourishing employees are not only more resilient and engaged, but they also contribute meaningfully to organisational goals through enhanced performance, collaboration, and creativity.³ In the South African context, where workplaces are characterised by diverse cultural dynamics, socio-economic challenges, and evolving organisational demands, understanding what contributes to workplace flourishing is both timely and essential. Existing research suggests that contextual factors such as leadership quality, psychological resources, social connection, and meaningful work all play a role in enabling employees to thrive.⁴

However, much remains to be understood about how South African employees perceive and experience flourishing in their own work environments. Given the country's unique socio-historical landscape and persistent inequalities, exploring flourishing through the voices and lived experiences of employees offers valuable insights for both scholarship and practice. This article seeks to deepen our understanding of workplace flourishing by examining its key dimensions—emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being—through the perspectives of South African employees. By exploring these elements, the study aims to contribute to a more holistic understanding of employee well-being in the South African workplace and to inform interventions that foster sustainable organisational health and performance.

The study is grounded in the PERMA model theory developed by Seligman in order to understand workplace flourishing. PERMA outlines five main aspects, namely, positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment. All of these aspects collectively work together to promote personal fulfilment and good functioning. Positive emotions boost resilience and morale in the workplace; engagement shows a deep commitment to one's work; relationships encourage cooperation and support; meaning gives one a sense of direction; and achievement inspires drive and competence. The study's dimensions of flourishing, namely, emotional, social and psychological well-being, are closely aligned with these components. By applying the PERMA model, this research offers a holistic view of employee well-being and highlights the importance of creating work environments that enable individuals not just to perform, but to thrive.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Flourishing is a multidimensional construct that represents an optimal state of mental well-being, encompassing both hedonic (pleasure-oriented) and eudaimonic (purpose-oriented) dimensions of human functioning.⁵ It extends beyond the mere absence of mental illness, describing individuals who experience high levels of psychological, emotional, and social well-being.⁶ As an outcome of positive psychology, flourishing has garnered increased academic interest for its potential to enhance human potential, resilience, and social contribution. Flourishing as the ultimate goal of human existence; is viewed as being important and not just as a means to an end, and it is the absence of debilitating parts of the human experience i.e., sadness, anxiety, rage, and fear,⁷ as well as the presence of facilitating elements i.e., positive emotions, which means healthy relationships, environmental mastery, engagement, and self-actualisation. An individual flourishes, according to Strümpfer, when they have high levels of emotional well-being and function well both psychologically and socially; they have a positive outlook on life and

² Corey L M Keyes, "The Mental Health Continuum: From Languishing to Flourishing in Life," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 2002, 207–22; S. Rothmann, "From Happiness to Flourishing at Work: A Southern African Perspective," in *Well-Being Research in South Africa: Cross Cultural Advances in Positive Psychology*, ed. M. P. Wising (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer, 2013), 123–52.

³ Felicia A. Huppert and Timothy T. C. So, "Flourishing Across Europe: Application of a New Conceptual Framework for Defining Well-Being," *Social Indicators Research* 110, no. 3 (February 15, 2013): 837–61, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-011-9966-7>.

⁴ Kleinjan Redelinghuys, Sebastiaan Rothmann, and Elric Botha, "Workplace Flourishing: Measurement, Antecedents and Outcomes," *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology* 45 (January 9, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v45i0.1549>; Cindy Rautenbach and Sebastiaan Rothmann, "Psychometric Validation of the Flourishing-at-Work Scale – Short Form (FWS-SF): Results and Implications of a South African Study," *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 27, no. 4 (August 28, 2017): 303–9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2017.1347748>.

⁵ Morten L Kringelbach, Peter Vuust, and Gustavo Deco, "Building a Science of Human Pleasure, Meaning Making, and Flourishing," *Neuron* 112, no. 9 (2024): 1392–96.

⁶ Julie Butler and Margaret L Kern, "The PERMA-Profilier: A Brief Multidimensional Measure of Flourishing," *International Journal of Wellbeing* 6, no. 3 (2016).

⁷ Butler and Kern, "The PERMA-Profilier: A Brief Multidimensional Measure of Flourishing."

are actively and constructively involved.⁸ Although flourishing was first thought to occur in everyday life, scholars such as Rothmann⁹ demonstrate that it also occurs in organisational and work settings.¹⁰ Building on the study of Keyes, Rothmann studied the multidimensionality of flourishing, comprising emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being in the work context.¹¹ Workplace flourishing has been defined as an employee's perception that he or she is feeling and functioning well in the workplace.¹² Puchalska-Wasyl and Zarzycka suggest that well-being is considered the cornerstone of workers' happiness when it comes to their work.¹³ This suggestion from the latter authors is important because well-being in organisations potentially may bring more stability and better functionality across the workplace, encouraging employees to be more productive and fulfilled.¹⁴ Overall, flourishing represents an important construct that provides insight into the conditions necessary for individuals to thrive and lead fulfilling lives.

Emotional Well-Being

Emotional well-being constitutes a vital dimension of overall well-being, encompassing an individual's ability to regulate emotions, sustain positive affect, and maintain emotional balance.¹⁵ It is positively associated with a wide range of desirable outcomes, including enhanced physical health, life satisfaction, and quality interpersonal relationships.¹⁶ Keyes defines emotional well-being as both general life satisfaction and the frequent experience of positive emotions, and also includes domain-specific satisfaction, such as satisfaction with work, health, and family.¹⁷ In organisational settings, emotional well-being is more than the presence or absence of momentary emotions. It is conceptualised as comprising three primary components: positive affect, negative affect, and job satisfaction.¹⁸ Promoting emotional well-being in the workplace involves cultivating emotional self-awareness, resilience, and regulation through mindfulness, cognitive-behavioural techniques, and positive psychology interventions.¹⁹ Moreover, broader environmental and structural factors, such as supportive work cultures and reduced socio-economic disparities, also play a crucial role.

Positive Affect

Positive affect refers to the extent to which individuals experience and express positive emotions, such as enthusiasm, joy, optimism, and confidence.²⁰ Keyes associates it with feelings of being cheerful, calm,

⁸ Deodandus J W Strümpfer, "Towards Fortigenesis and Fortology: An Informed Essay," in *Well-Being Research in South Africa* (Springer, 2013), 7–37.

⁹ Rothmann, S. (2013). From happiness to flourishing at work: A southern African perspective. In: M. P. Wising (Ed.), *Well-being research in South Africa: Cross cultural advances in positive psychology* (123–152). Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer.

¹⁰ Redelinghuys, J.J. *Flourishing of teachers in secondary schools*. Doctoral thesis. North-West, North-West University. Potchefstroom (2016); Antonio Ariza-Montes et al., "Work Engagement and Flourishing at Work among Nuns: The Moderating Role of Human Values," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018): 1874.

¹¹ Rothmann, "From Happiness to Flourishing at Work: A Southern African Perspective."

¹² C. L. Rautenbach, "Flourishing of Employees in a Fast-Moving Consumable Goods Environment" (North-West University, 2015).

¹³ Małgorzata M Puchalska-Wasyl and Beata Zarzycka, "Prayer and Internal Dialogical Activity: How Do They Predict Well-Being?," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 12, no. 4 (2020): 417.

¹⁴ M.D. Nasina and K. P. Doris, "The Workplace Spirituality and Affective Commitment among Auditors in Big Four Public Accounting Firms: Does It Matter?," *Journal of Global Management*, 2011, 216–26.

¹⁵ Todd B Kashdan and Jonathan Rottenberg, "Psychological Flexibility as a Fundamental Aspect of Health," *Clinical Psychology Review* 30, no. 7 (2010): 865–78.

¹⁶ Ed Diener, Shigehiro Oishi, and Richard E Lucas, "National Accounts of Subjective Well-Being," *American Psychologist* 70, no. 3 (2015): 234.

¹⁷ G. M., Spreitzer, C. F., Lam, and C. Fritz, "Engagement and Human Thriving: Complementary Perspectives on Energy and Connections to Work," in *Work Engagement: A Handbook of Essential Theory and Research*, ed. A. B. Bakker and M. P. Leiter (Psychology Press, 2010), 132–46.

¹⁸ Samuel Georg Eric Stelzner and Corne S L Schutte, "Employee Flourishing Strategic Framework," *South African Journal of Industrial Engineering* 27, no. 3 (2016): 92–109.

¹⁹ Felicia A Huppert and Daniel M Johnson, "A Controlled Trial of Mindfulness Training in Schools: The Importance of Practice for an Impact on Well-Being," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 5, no. 4 (2010): 264–74.

²⁰ Corey L M Keyes, "Promoting and Protecting Mental Health as Flourishing: A Complementary Strategy for Improving National Mental Health," *American Psychologist* 62, no. 2 (2007): 95; Llewellyn Ellardus Van Zyl and Sebastiaan Rothmann, "Beyond Smiling: The Evaluation of a Positive Psychological Intervention Aimed at Student Happiness," *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 22, no. 3 (January 2012): 369–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2012.10820541>.

and actively engaged in life.²¹ Positive emotions are central to the concept of flourishing and can be intentionally fostered to enhance overall well-being. Empirical evidence suggests that cultivating positive affect strengthens psychological, social, and physical resources, thereby enhancing resilience. Therefore, daily practices such as gratitude reflection and social connection have been identified as effective strategies for promoting positive emotional states.²²

Negative Affect

In contrast, negative affect encompasses the experience of unpleasant emotional states such as anger, anxiety, shame, fear, and sadness.²³ This is often associated with a negative self-concept and heightened psychological distress. As such, elevated levels of negative affect have been linked to increased risks of depression, burnout, and chronic stress, underscoring its detrimental impact on employee well-being.²⁴

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is defined as the positive emotional response resulting from the appraisal of one's job and job experiences.²⁵ It reflects the degree to which employees perceive that their work-related needs, values, and expectations are being met. While some scholars frame job satisfaction as a cognitive evaluation, others conceptualise it as an affective or attitudinal outcome.²⁶ The latter is shaped by various individual and contextual factors, including compensation, supervision, peer relationships, and opportunities for professional growth.²⁷

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being (PWB) refers to optimal human functioning, rooted in the eudaimonic perspective of living a meaningful, purposeful, and self-actualised life.²⁸ Ryff conceptualised psychological well-being as involving personal growth and positive interaction with one's environment.²⁹ While earlier scholars viewed well-being through the lens of life satisfaction and affective balance,³⁰ others, such as Ryan and Deci, highlight its foundation in fulfilling universal psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.³¹ Keyes supports this view, suggesting that individuals flourish when they feel healthy, capable, and psychologically whole.³² Rothmann adapted this framework to the workplace context and identified key dimensions of psychological well-being: autonomy, competence, positive relationships, personal growth, meaningful work, and work engagement.³³

²¹ Corey L. M. Keyes, "Mental Health as a Complete State: How the Salutogenic Perspective Completes the Picture," in *Bridging Occupational, Organizational and Public Health* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2014), 179–92, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5640-3_11.

²² Admassu N Lamu and Jan Abel Olsen, "The Relative Importance of Health, Income and Social Relations for Subjective Well-Being: An Integrative Analysis," *Social Science & Medicine* 152 (2016): 176–85.

²³ J. M. Ivancevich, R. Konopaske, and M. T. Matteson, *Organisational Behaviour and Management*, 7th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, 2005).

²⁴ Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson, *Organisational Behaviour and Management*.

²⁵ E.A. Locke, "The Nature and Causes of Job Satisfaction," in *Handbook of Industrial and Organisational Psychology* (Dunnette, M.D., 1976), 1297–1343.

²⁶ Mariano Rojas and Ruut Veenhoven, "Contentment and Affect in the Estimation of Happiness," *Social Indicators Research* 110, no. 2 (2013): 415–31.

²⁷ Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson, *Organisational Behaviour and Management*.

²⁸ M Dhanabhakyaam and M Sarath, "Psychological Wellbeing: A Systematic Literature Review," *International Journal of Advanced Research in Science Communication and Technology*, 2023, 603–7.

²⁹ Carol D. Ryff, "Happiness Is Everything, or Is It? Explorations on the Meaning of Psychological Well-Being.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57, no. 6 (December 1989): 1069–81, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069>.

³⁰ Carol D Ryff and Corey Lee M Keyes, "The Structure of Psychological Well-Being Revisited.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69, no. 4 (1995): 719; Ed Diener et al., "New Well-Being Measures: Short Scales to Assess Flourishing and Positive and Negative Feelings," *Social Indicators Research* 97, no. 2 (2010): 143–56.

³¹ R. M., Ryan and E. L. Deci, *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness* (Guilford Press, 2018).

³² Keyes, "Mental Health as a Complete State: How the Salutogenic Perspective Completes the Picture."

³³ Rothmann, "From Happiness to Flourishing at Work: A Southern African Perspective."

Autonomy

Autonomy refers to an individual's sense of self-determination and independence in thoughts and actions, even in environments that promote conformity. It involves internal regulation of behaviour, self-evaluation based on personal standards, and the capacity to resist external pressures.³⁴

Competence

Competence reflects the desire to interact effectively with one's environment and master work-related tasks. According to Ryan and Deci, individuals are intrinsically motivated to seek competence because it brings personal satisfaction and a sense of achievement.³⁵ When supported, this dimension enhances adaptability, motivation, and workplace well-being.

Positive Relationships with Others

Positive relationships or relatedness—capture the fundamental human need to form caring, reciprocal connections. Individuals who experience strong social bonds typically report higher well-being and even improved physical health outcomes. Social support and a sense of belonging are therefore essential for flourishing.³⁶

Personal Growth

Personal growth involves the ongoing pursuit of knowledge, skills, and self-development. Employees with a strong learning orientation are driven by the need for growth and self-actualisation.³⁷ Maslow's hierarchy of needs places this at the pinnacle of psychological development, emphasising the fulfilment of intellectual and emotional potential.³⁸

Meaningful Work

Meaningful work is a core dimension of eudaimonic well-being and refers to experiencing one's work as purposeful, valuable, and connected to a broader societal or personal mission. Thus, employees who view their work as meaningful report higher motivation, engagement, and well-being. Therefore, having a clear sense of meaning that is rooted in personal values and purpose could be linked to better health, longevity, and overall life satisfaction.³⁹

Work Engagement

Work engagement refers to a positive, fulfilling state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption. It reflects deep involvement in one's work, often described as a state of "flow" marked by enthusiasm and concentration. Engaged employees experience personal meaning in their tasks and often report high job satisfaction, energy, and a sense of purpose. As such, this state is essential for sustained workplace well-being and performance.⁴⁰

Social Well-Being

Social well-being refers to an individual's functioning and satisfaction within social contexts, including relationships with others, the broader community, and society at large.⁴¹ When individuals' social needs, such as meaningful family relationships, community involvement, and acceptance, are fulfilled, they tend to experience greater ease and psychological stability.⁴² Although conceptualised as a one-dimensional

³⁴ Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson, *Organisational Behaviour and Management* .

³⁵ Ryan and Deci, *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*.

³⁶ Kashdan and Rottenberg, "Psychological Flexibility as a Fundamental Aspect of Health."

³⁷ Kashdan and Rottenberg, "Psychological Flexibility as a Fundamental Aspect of Health."

³⁸ A. H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1971).

³⁹ M. F. Steger, "Creating Meaning and Purpose at Work," in *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of Positivity and Strengths-Based Approaches at Work*, ed. L.G. Oades et al. (John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 2017), 60–81.

⁴⁰ Margaret L Kern et al., "Assessing Employee Wellbeing in Schools Using a Multifaceted Approach: Associations with Physical Health, Life Satisfaction, and Professional Thriving," *Psychology* 5, no. 6 (2014): 500–513.

⁴¹ C. L. M. Keyes and A. D. Shapiro, "Social Well-Being in the United States: A Descriptive Epidemiology," in *How Healthy Are We? A National Study of Well-Being at Midlife*, ed. O. G. Brim, C. D. Ryff, and R. C. Kessler (The University of Chicago Press., 2004), 350–72; Elvira Cicognani, "Social Well-Being," in *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research* (Springer, 2024), 6714–17.

⁴² Trish Hill and Timothy Broady, "Understanding the Social and Emotional Needs of Carers," 2019.

construct, social well-being comprises five interrelated components: social acceptance, social actualisation, social coherence, social integration, and social contribution.⁴³

- Social acceptance involves a trusting and positive view of others. Individuals high in social acceptance believe in the kindness, potential, and integrity of people, and maintain positive attitudes toward human nature.
- Social actualisation reflects an individual's belief in the potential and progress of society. It includes the perception that society is capable of growth and improvement through its institutions and people.
- Social coherence refers to one's ability to perceive the social world as structured, understandable, and meaningful. Individuals with high social coherence are curious about society, seek to understand it, and find purpose in its operations.
- Social integration denotes the extent to which individuals feel a sense of belonging and shared identity within their social networks or communities. It involves feeling connected to others in one's immediate environment or organisation.
- Social contribution captures an individual's perception of their value and impact on society. It reflects the belief that one plays a meaningful role within the community and has something valuable to offer.⁴⁴

Together, these dimensions provide a holistic understanding of how individuals relate to and derive meaning from their social environments, which in turn contributes significantly to overall flourishing in the workplace.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was conducted from a positivist perspective, allowing for an objective examination of employees' perceptions regarding workplace spirituality.⁴⁵ A deductive approach to research was adopted.⁴⁶ The study followed a descriptive, cross-sectional, and explanatory research design,⁴⁷ which was considered suitable for exploring how workplace spirituality affects employees. A quantitative methodology was employed, and data were collected using a survey strategy.

Research Participants

The study targeted employed residents in a town within South Africa's Free State province. Participants were selected based on specific criteria: individuals who had completed Grade 12, were actively employed, and were between 15 and 65 years of age. These criteria ensured that participants possessed sufficient English proficiency to comprehend the questionnaire. A total of 394 respondents met these requirements. Of these, 138 (35%) were male, and 256 (65%) were female. The age distribution was as follows: 2% were 20 years or younger, 33% were aged 21–30, 32% were aged 31–40, 20% were aged 41–50, 9% were aged 51–60, and 4% were aged 61 or older. In terms of work experience, 50% (n = 198) had between 6 and 10 years of experience, 22% (n = 87) had less than 6 years, 17% (n = 67) had 11 to 15 years, 10% (n = 41) had 16 years or more, and one respondent did not indicate their work experience.

Measuring Instruments

Data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire consisting of two sections. Section A gathered demographic information to describe the sample, including questions about race, gender, age, years of service with their current employer, and the highest level of education. Section B assessed

⁴³ Corey L. M. Keyes, "Complete Mental Health: An Agenda for the 21st Century.," in *Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived*. (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2003), 293–312, <https://doi.org/10.1037/10594-013>.

⁴⁴ Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson, *Organisational Behaviour and Management*.

⁴⁵ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research : Planning and Design* (Pearson, 2016).

⁴⁶ John Ward Creswell and John David Creswell, *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018).

⁴⁷ Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis, and Adrian Thornhill, *Research Methods for Business Students* (Pearson education, 2009); Maninder Singh Setia, "Methodology Series Module 3: Cross-Sectional Studies," *Indian Journal of Dermatology* 61, no. 3 (2016): 261–64.

workplace flourishing, which includes the dimensions of emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being using the Flourishing-at-Work Scale (FAWS) instrument developed by Rautenbach.⁴⁸ Responses were captured using a five-point Likert scale.

Statistical Analysis

A qualified statistician was consulted during the development of the data analysis plan. Data from the questionnaires, exported to Microsoft Excel, was analysed using SmartPLS version 3.2.7. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed, which estimates model parameters by maximizing the explained variance across constructs.⁴⁹ This method is suitable for complex models and was used in accordance with the guidance of Hair et al.⁵⁰

Research Procedure

Before the main study, a pilot test involving 40 individuals from the target population was conducted. These individuals were not part of the final sample. The purpose of the pilot was to detect any confusing, biased, or suggestive items and to determine how long it would take to complete the questionnaire. Feedback from two Human Resource Management experts was used to assess content validity, while their comments also supported the face validity of the instrument. Preliminary reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha yielded scores between 0.71 and 0.95, indicating satisfactory to excellent internal consistency. Based on input from the statistician, the questionnaire's structure was refined, and subsections were added to enhance its clarity. The revised questionnaire was then distributed to the main study participants.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Faculty Research and Innovation Committee of the Faculty of Management Sciences at the Central University of Technology. The final version of the questionnaire was shared online via QuestionPro. An introductory letter, featuring the university's name and logo, explained the purpose of the study, the research process, and ethical assurances such as confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point without consequence.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Workplace flourishing was measured with the Flourishing at Work scale.¹² The scale measures three dimensions of workplace flourishing, namely emotional well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being. Emotional well-being consists of three sub-dimensions, namely positive affect, negative affect and job satisfaction, and psychological well-being consists of the following sub-dimensions, namely autonomy, competence, relatedness, learning, meaning and purpose, and work engagement. The value 1 corresponds to "never" and the value 6 corresponds to "everyday". The mean point of the scale is 3 (6/2). Mean scores below or equal to three show that the scale leans more towards never, once or twice, and once a week, while mean scores above three refer to "about two or three times per week", or "almost every day or every day".

Table 1: Measures of central tendency of workplace flourishing

Constructs	Mean	Median	SD	Interpretation
Positive affect	4.63	4.67	0.466	Most respondents tend to have positive emotions at work (mean=4.63)
Negative affect	1.47	1.33	0.536	Most respondents are less likely to show negative emotions at work (mean=1.47).
Job satisfaction	4.33	4.33	0.62	Most respondents are satisfied with their jobs (mean=4.33).

⁴⁸ Rautenbach, "Flourishing of Employees in a Fast-Moving Consumable Goods Environment."

⁴⁹ Jörg Henseler, "Bridging Design and Behavioral Research with Variance-Based Structural Equation Modeling," *Journal of Advertising* 46, no. 1 (2017): 178–92.

⁵⁰ Joseph F Hair et al., "Multivariate Data Analysis" (Cengage learning Hampshire, 2019).

Social wellbeing	4.49	4.60	0.518	Most respondents reported social well-being (mean=4.49).
Autonomy	4.52	4.67	0.552	Most respondents feel a sense of autonomy at work (mean=4.52).
Competence	4.62	5.00	0.525	Most respondents are most likely to feel competent at work (mean= 4.62).
Relatedness	4.55	4.67	0.514	Most respondents are feeling a sense of relatedness in their workplace (mean=4.55).
Learning	4.52	4.50	0.564	Respondents tend to learn at work (mean=4.52).
Meaning and purpose	4.61	4.75	0.427	Most respondents feel a sense of meaning and purpose at work (mean=4.61).
Work engagement	4.56	4.67	0.478	Respondents tend to be engaged in their work (mean=4.56).

Source: Author's own thesis (Tigedi, 2023)

From the measures of central tendency regarding workplace flourishing presented in Table 1, it is evident that respondents are displaying mostly positive emotions at work, with a few indicating that they mostly display negative emotions at work and are generally satisfied with their work. Measures of central tendency further indicate that employees experience social well-being. In terms of psychological well-being the findings show that employees reported feeling a sense of autonomy and competence, that they related positively to others and learn at work. They also reported positively about finding meaning and purpose at work and that they are experiencing work engagement to some extent.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study offer compelling evidence that employees in the Matjhabeng municipal area experience high levels of flourishing at work. This is particularly encouraging within the context of the South African public sector, which is often associated with high levels of stress, under-resourcing, and systemic inefficiencies.⁵¹ Despite these challenges, the participants in this study reported strong emotional, psychological, and social functioning as key elements of flourishing² and expanded upon in the South African context.

Emotional well-being

Positive, negative and job satisfaction are dimensions of emotional well-being as previously stipulated. The construct of positive affect achieved the highest emotional well-being score ($M = 4.63$), indicating that most respondents frequently experience enthusiasm, pride, and inspiration in their work. This corresponds with Seligman's argument that positive emotions broaden awareness, build enduring psychological resources and overall flourishing. This is consistent with the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, which suggests that frequent experiences of positive affect can enhance psychological resilience, broaden cognitive flexibility, and strengthen interpersonal resources. In the workplace, such emotions contribute to creative problem-solving, cooperation, and sustained engagement. The high level of positive affect suggests that even within potentially constrained environments, employees are finding sources of satisfaction and joy. Conversely, negative affect yielded the lowest score ($M = 1.47$), implying that most employees seldom experience anger, sadness, or anxiety at work. Low negative affect supports the PERMA model's assertion that flourishing arises when positive emotional experiences significantly outweigh negative ones. This finding is meaningful in light of the mental health challenges, particularly within South Africa, where one in six individuals experiences anxiety or depression.⁵² The low level of negative affect may be attributed to strong social bonds at work, supportive supervisors, or meaningful

⁵¹ David E Guest, "Human Resource Management and Employee Well-being: Towards a New Analytic Framework," *Human Resource Management Journal* 27, no. 1 (2017): 22–38; Amanda Erasmus and Elrie Oosthuysen, "Emotional Labour, Burnout and Work Engagement amongst Service Centre Employees in South Africa," *SA Journal of Human Resource Management* 23, no. 0 (January 16, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v23i0.2771>.

⁵² SACAP (South African College of Applied Psychology), "The Shocking State of Mental Health in South Africa in 2019," 2019, <https://www.sacap.edu.za/blog/management-leadership/mental-health-southafrica/>.

work responsibilities, factors often linked to reduced emotional strain.⁵³ Job satisfaction recorded a high mean score of 4.33, further reinforcing that employees perceive their jobs as fulfilling. Job satisfaction aligns with both Positive Emotion and Meaning within PERMA because employees derive fulfilment not only from day-to-day emotions but also from experiencing a sense of purpose in their roles. Job satisfaction is a key indicator of both emotional well-being and organisational health,⁵⁴ and job satisfaction is closely linked to meaningful work, positive organisational values, and alignment between personal and professional beliefs.⁵⁵ This supports the argument made by Ashmos and Duchon that employees seek more than financial reward; they seek purpose, connection, and holistic fulfilment.⁵⁶

Psychological Well-Being

Autonomy, competence, relatedness, learning, meaning and purpose, and work engagement together form the psychological well-being domain, and all yielded mean scores above 4.50, reflecting a highly engaged and psychologically strong workforce. Autonomy (M = 4.52) reflects that employees perceived the ability to make decisions and exercise control over their work. According to Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory, autonomy is a core psychological need and directly contributes to intrinsic motivation and satisfaction.⁵⁷ Seligman further explains that autonomy enhances an individual's experience of dignity and self-worth at work.⁵⁸ Competence (M = 4.62) was the highest scoring psychological dimension, suggesting that employees feel highly capable and confident in their roles. Tigedi asserted that competence supports motivation, performance, and self-efficacy, which are all critical for flourishing, especially in complex or bureaucratic environments.⁵⁹ As highlighted by Rothmann, a sense of competence reinforces purpose and reduces disengagement.⁶⁰ Relatedness (M = 4.55) illustrates that employees feel connected and valued by colleagues, thus complementing the social well-being findings, which is supported by Tigedi et al., who stress that quality work relationships are foundational to psychological safety and thriving.⁶¹ With regards to learning (M = 4.52), the results indicate that most employees perceive ample opportunities for growth and personal development. Continuous learning is known to enhance psychological flexibility, adaptive thinking, and resilience.⁶² In dynamic public sector environments, such learning fosters both individual and organisational agility. Similarly, meaning and purpose (M = 4.61) reflects the extent to which employees see their work as valuable and aligned with their personal values. This sense of meaningful work is especially important in service-oriented contexts, as it helps individuals manage stress and fosters long-term commitment.⁶³

Lastly, work engagement (M = 4.56) findings represent the employees' emotional and cognitive involvement in their work. Engagement is a crucial predictor of productivity, creativity, and organisational commitment.⁶⁴ According to Demerouti and Bakker, engaged employees demonstrated higher levels of energy, focus, and persistence.⁶⁵ The overall analysis of individual flourishing constructs supports the

⁵³ Freda Van der Walt, "Workplace Spirituality, Work Engagement and Thriving at Work," *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology* 44 (January 17, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v44i0.1457>.

⁵⁴ Corey L. M. Keyes and Julia Annas, "Feeling Good and Functioning Well: Distinctive Concepts in Ancient Philosophy and Contemporary Science," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 4, no. 3 (May 1, 2009): 197–201, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760902844228>; Matthew J Johnson and Lixin Jiang, "Reaping the Benefits of Meaningful Work: The Mediating versus Moderating Role of Work Engagement," *Stress and Health* 33, no. 3 (2017): 288–97.

⁵⁵ Bayad Jamal Ali and Govand Anwar, "An Empirical Study of Employees' Motivation and Its Influence Job Satisfaction," *International Journal of Engineering, Business and Management* 5, no. 2 (2021): 21–30, <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijebm.5.2.3>.

⁵⁶ Donde P Ashmos and Dennis Duchon, "Spirituality at Work: A Conceptualization and Measure," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 9, no. 2 (2000): 134–45.

⁵⁷ Ryan and Deci, *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*.

⁵⁸ Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*.

⁵⁹ Keyes, "The Mental Health Continuum: From Languishing to Flourishing in Life."

⁶⁰ Rothmann, "From Happiness to Flourishing at Work: A Southern African Perspective."

⁶¹ Tigedi, Van der Walt, and Nyetanyane, "Workplace Spirituality and Its Relevance to Workplace Flourishing."

⁶² Badrinarayan Shankar Pawar, "Workplace Spirituality and Employee Well-Being: An Empirical Examination," *Employee Relations* 38, no. 6 (October 3, 2016): 975–94, <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-11-2015-0215>.

⁶³ Thomas A Wright and Ching-Chu Huang, "The Many Benefits of Employee Well-being in Organizational Research," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 33, no. 8 (2012): 1188–92; R. Yeoman et al., "Introduction and Overview," in *The Oxford Handbook of Meaningful Work*, ed. R Yeoman et al. (Oxford University Press, 2019), 1–22.

⁶⁴ Gordon B. Parker and Matthew P. Hyett, "Measurement of Well-Being in the Workplace," *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease* 199, no. 6 (June 2011): 394–97, <https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0b013e31821cd3b9>.

⁶⁵ Evangelia Demerouti and Arnold B Bakker, "The Job Demands-Resources Model: Challenges for Future Research," *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology* 37, no. 2 (2011): 1–9.

relevance of the multidimensional flourishing model within a South African municipal workforce. Despite known challenges in the public sector, employees in this sample report high levels of emotional positivity, psychological capability, and social integration. These results underscore the importance of cultivating work environments that promote not only productivity but also meaning, connection, and personal growth. As emphasised, flourishing employees are more likely to cope with challenges, contribute positively to their organisations, and experience greater life satisfaction overall.⁶⁶ Overall, the psychological well-being results support the relevance of the PERMA model in explaining flourishing within South African municipal environments.

Social Well-Being

With a mean score of 4.49, social well-being demonstrates a strong sense of community, inclusion, and social contribution among employees. According to Keyes, social integration and social acceptance are critical subcomponents of flourishing, and are central to understanding how individuals perceive their role and value within a broader social system. In collectivist cultures such as South Africa, where relational harmony, ubuntu and interdependence are deeply embedded, these dimensions become even more noticeable.⁶⁷ High social integration suggests that employees not only feel connected to their colleagues but also experience a sense of belonging that affirms their identity within the organisation. Similarly, strong social acceptance indicates that employees perceive others as trustworthy, supportive, and respectful, which enhances psychological safety and improves the quality of interpersonal relationships. When employees feel that they make meaningful contributions to their team or organisation, their sense of purpose is strengthened, reinforcing both job satisfaction and organisational commitment.⁶⁸ A high level of social well-being can play a critical protective role in the workplace. Employees who feel socially connected are more resilient and better equipped to manage stress, as supportive interpersonal networks serve as buffers against emotional strain and uncertainty. Such environments typically experience lower absenteeism, as employees are more motivated to engage, participate, and maintain consistent attendance. Moreover, strong social well-being encourages prosocial behaviours such as collaborative problem-solving, information sharing, empathy, and organisational citizenship behaviours, all of which derive from and reinforce PERMA's emphasis on high-quality relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study highlight that workplace flourishing is a crucial indicator of employee well-being and should be integrated into organisational development strategies. Employee well-being extends beyond managing physical health and stress—it also involves emotional satisfaction, psychological growth, and meaningful social connections. The high levels of emotional well-being observed among participants suggest that organisations should prioritise creating a positive emotional climate. This can be achieved by acknowledging employee contributions, promoting work-life balance, and fostering a culture of recognition and appreciation. Positive emotions broaden individuals' thought-action repertoires and build enduring psychological resources. Therefore, strategies such as regular feedback, transparent communication, and initiatives like wellness days or flexible work arrangements can help maintain emotional well-being and engagement.

Psychological well-being, which reflects employees' sense of meaning, competence, autonomy, and engagement, also scored highly. Organisations can support this dimension by offering opportunities for personal growth and aligning roles with employees' strengths and values. According to Seligman's well-being theory, individuals are more likely to flourish when their work feels purposeful and resonates with their identity. Providing coaching, developmental feedback, and skill-building opportunities allows employees to grow, feel empowered in their roles, and build long-term commitment to the organisation. Additionally, the results emphasise the importance of social well-being as a key component of flourishing. This suggests that organisations should also invest in fostering a sense of connection and community in the workplace. Employees who feel socially connected are more likely to collaborate, trust one another,

⁶⁶ Keyes, "Mental Health as a Complete State: How the Salutogenic Perspective Completes the Picture."

⁶⁷ Keyes, "Mental Health as a Complete State: How the Salutogenic Perspective Completes the Picture."

⁶⁸ R. N. Tigedi, "The Relationship between Workplace Spirituality and Flourishing" (Central University of Technology, 2023).

and experience psychological safety. Team-building initiatives, peer mentoring programmes, and inclusive leadership practices can strengthen workplace relationships and reduce feelings of isolation. Leadership plays a central role in promoting flourishing. Leaders who take a strengths-based, relational approach help create an environment where employees feel valued, supported, and motivated.⁶⁹ By building authentic relationships, encouraging growth, and modelling positive behaviours, leaders can shape a workplace culture that supports flourishing at all levels. Therefore, to foster flourishing workplaces, particularly within the South African context, organisations must move beyond deficit-based wellness models. Instead, they should adopt a proactive, holistic approach that enhances emotional, psychological, and social well-being. This not only benefits individual employees but also contributes to a more resilient, engaged, and high-performing workforce.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights into the state of workplace flourishing within a South African context, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research employed a cross-sectional design, which captures perceptions at a single point in time. As a result, it is not possible to draw causal inferences or understand how flourishing may evolve in response to organisational changes or external challenges. Future research could address this limitation by using longitudinal designs to explore changes in flourishing over time and in response to interventions or leadership shifts. Another limitation is the use of a non-probability sampling method within a specific geographical region employees in the Matjhabeng municipal area. While the sample was adequate in size, it may not fully represent the broader diversity of the South African workforce. Thus, the generalizability of the results to other sectors or provinces may be limited. Future studies could use probability sampling across multiple sectors and regions to better capture national trends in workplace flourishing.

Moreover, while this article focused solely on the construct of flourishing, future studies could explore its antecedents and outcomes in greater depth. For instance, examining the role of leadership style, organisational culture, psychological capital, or job demands–resources as predictors of flourishing could offer valuable insights for practice.⁷⁰ Similarly, investigating how flourishing impacts productivity, innovation, and employee retention could reinforce its strategic value in human resources management. Although this study contributes to the growing body of research on workplace well-being, it underlines the need for continued, context-sensitive research that examines both the drivers and consequences of flourishing across diverse organisational settings.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the levels of workplace flourishing among employees within the South African municipal context, focusing on the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of well-being. The findings revealed that participants generally experience high levels of flourishing, suggesting that despite the challenges present in many public sector environments, employees are capable of experiencing meaning, connection, and satisfaction in their work. The results support the relevance of positive psychology frameworks, particularly the conceptualization of flourishing as more than the absence of distress but the presence of thriving in multiple domains of functioning. Emotional well-being emerged as the strongest dimension, underscoring the importance of cultivating positive affect and job satisfaction. Psychological and social well-being also demonstrated strong results, reflecting employees' experiences of meaning, competence, belonging, and connectedness.

As South African organisations strive to improve employee morale, engagement, and productivity, workplace flourishing offers a valuable lens through which to develop proactive human resource strategies. By intentionally investing in the conditions that support emotional, psychological, and social wellness, organisations can create environments where employees are not merely surviving but truly

⁶⁹ He Ding, Enhai Yu, and Yanbin Li, "Strengths-Based Leadership and Its Impact on Task Performance: A Preliminary Study," *South African Journal of Business Management* 51, no. 1 (December 17, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v51i1.1832>.

⁷⁰ Arnold B. Bakker and Juriena D. de Vries, "Job Demands–Resources Theory and Self-Regulation: New Explanations and Remedies for Job Burnout," *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping* 34, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2020.1797695>; Fred Luthans and Carolyn M. Youssef-Morgan, "Psychological Capital: An Evidence-Based Positive Approach," *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 4, no. 1 (March 21, 2017): 339–66, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113324>.

flourishing. Future research should continue to explore this construct across different industries, using mixed-method approaches to uncover deeper insights into what enables sustainable employee well-being. In doing so, scholars and practitioners alike can contribute to a healthier, more resilient workforce equipped to thrive in the complexities of modern work.

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