



Simmons University
Institute for
Inclusive Leadership

Thriving *at Work* 2024



Executive Summary

Since the writing of *Arrive and Thrive: 7 Impactful Practices for Women Navigating Leadership*, we have been researching the criticality of thriving at work. This includes establishing the business case for women thriving at work, and clarifying why thriving matters, what thriving means to women, and how leaders, cultures, and women themselves either support or inhibit thriving.

In 2023, our Thriving at Work research revealed that when employees are thriving, they are more productive, more likely to go “above and beyond,” and more effective. We also identified three essentials for women thriving at work.

In 2024, we turned a one-time survey into our new Thrive Index™ to track the trends. We looked deeper into the key enablers and barriers our workforces are facing when it comes to thriving.

What emerges from this year’s data underscores both positive progress and areas that require attention:

- Women are thriving, but there is significant room for improvement
- They are optimistic that they will thrive in the coming year
- They take responsibility for their own thriving
- In order to thrive, women also need effective leadership—marked by transparent communication, support, and a commitment to growth—as well as opportunities to learn and develop

The fact that women feel a sense of self determination around their own thriving is great news, and these findings leave us cautiously optimistic about women thriving in 2025. When women feel empowered to make choices about their well-being, careers, and relationships at work, they are more likely to pursue opportunities that align with their values and aspirations. They will likely also feel increased self confidence and self worth. Moreover, self-determined women often become role models, inspiring others

THRIVING ESSENTIALS

1. Making a positive contribution
2. Having the opportunity to learn and grow
3. Being valued and recognized

THRIVING DEFINED

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

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

to embrace their own potential, which can create a ripple effect of empowerment across organizations, as well as other positive business impacts.

Our results this year showed a new emphasis on the need for transparent and frequent communication, which is vital in fostering trust, alignment, and engagement within organizations. Transparency ensures that team members have access to accurate and relevant information, reducing uncertainty and preventing misunderstandings. Frequent communication enables employees to stay informed about organizational goals, changes, and expectations. This promotes a culture of openness, where employees feel valued and heard, which supports thriving as well as belonging.

As highlighted in our 2023 inaugural study, access to opportunities for learning, growth, and development is essential for women to thrive. Organizations can support women's advancement even when promotions are not immediately feasible by creating alternative opportunities for growth and development. Initiatives such as offering skill-building workshops, mentorship programs, and leadership training enable women to enhance their professional capabilities and prepare for future roles. Providing visible and challenging stretch assignments, and facilitating access to networking opportunities also helps women gain recognition and build strategic relationships.

Organizations that invest in their people, provide clear direction, and ensure a culture of respect and inclusivity are more likely to see thriving become a reality for their employees. These organizations will benefit from a more productive and engaged workforce that is more likely to go above and beyond, providing the extra discretionary effort that makes the difference between a good employee and a great one.

WHY DOES THRIVING MATTER?

Higher levels of productivity and discretionary effort.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ENABLERS TO THRIVING?

1. Supportive management and leadership
 2. Self determination
 3. Growth opportunities, including development and advancement
-

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO THRIVING?

1. Poor communication and lack of transparency
 2. Derailing actions from managers
-



The data and insights that inform this report are from **498 survey respondents**, who were participants of the Simmons Leadership Conference in April of 2024. This population includes primarily professional women in mid to large organizations.

The 2024 Thrive Index



Our H1 2024 Thrive Index reveals a score of **3.4 out of 5**, where 3 represents “some of the time” and 4 represents “most of the time.”

“When women feel empowered to make choices about their well-being, careers, and relationships at work, they are more likely to pursue opportunities that align with their values and aspirations.”

– 2024 Survey Participant



Key finding: Women are thriving, but there is significant room for improvement

Our first Index shows that on average, our respondents are thriving some of the time. In addition:

- 93% of respondents report that they are thriving at work
- 90% say thriving at work is either extremely or very important
- 81% believe their organization is committed to supporting their ability to thrive

However, the index value of 3.4 as well as other data we collected, make it clear that there is significant room for improvement. This means that neither the individuals, nor their organizations are getting the full benefit of thriving. Significant additional value can be created using the practical tools for individuals, leaders, and organizations that are shared in this report.

In December of 2024 we sent a pulse survey to update the Thrive Index; this data sets the

H2 Index at 3.2.

Although our response population was smaller than for our initial index, this decrease provides an indicator that recent developments in the cultural context are having an impact.





Key finding:
Thriving outlook is positive but may be shifting

Participants report they are thriving more than last year.

54% of our respondents say they are thriving more than they did last year, with only 20% reporting that they are thriving less.

In the first half of 2024, participants were optimistic about their ability to thrive in the future.

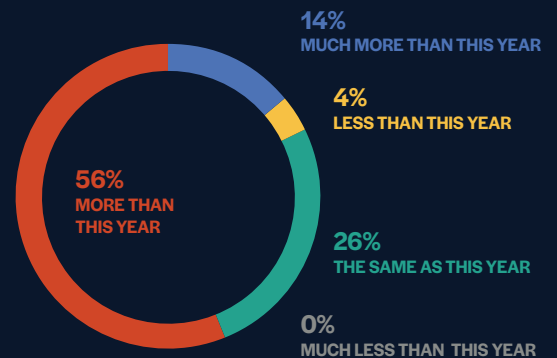
In the spring of 2024, 70% of respondents anticipated that they will thrive more next year, and only 4% anticipated they will thrive less next year.

As you look ahead to the next year, do you anticipate that you will feel like you are thriving:

THRIVING IS ON THE RISE

Participants are optimistic about their ability to thrive in the future.

In fact, 70% of respondents anticipate that they will thrive more next year, and only 4% anticipate they will thrive less next year.



This finding was consistent, regardless of the average number of hours worked or whether they work in the office, remotely, or hybrid. However, it is related to organizational commitment, both now and in the past, showing the important role that organizational culture plays in thriving. We also see a relationship with the respondent’s age, which we hypothesize could indicate employees’ increased agency around their own thriving as they advance in years.

Our H2 pulse survey data shows lower levels of optimism, with 51% of respondents expecting to thrive more in the coming year. In addition, a larger percentage (13%) expect to thrive less.

What are the key enablers to thriving?



Key finding:
The environment matters—so does personal initiative

People report that good leadership, having access to opportunities, and their own self determination are key factors in their increased sense of thriving.

We asked those who report they are thriving more this year than they did last year, what factors were responsible for the change. Three factors rose to the top in essentially identical levels:

Self determination

Many respondents point to their own agency, whether that's changing their mindset, developing more confidence, learning to say no, seeking out opportunities, or taking better care of their mental and physical wellbeing.

Similar themes were expressed when we analyzed the factors participants cited as responsible for their feeling that they will thrive more in the year ahead. In the answers to this question, self determination was an even more important factor. Respondents report that they plan to take responsibility for their own development, mindset, and wellbeing, including in some cases seeking out new jobs or other growth opportunities. They also say that they feel confident, and that they will build on the momentum from this year to thrive even more in the year ahead.

Supportive management and leadership

Employees also credit their increased thriving to leaders who support and empower them, whether through providing guidance, resources, or encouragement, ensuring that people feel seen, trusted, and valued. These leaders provide feedback, are clear about their expectations, and foster inclusion, among other positive behaviors.

“Being viewed and recognized and paid as a trusted partner is perhaps the most important key to thriving for me.”

– 2024 Survey Participant



Additionally, supportive leaders provide access to opportunities for growth and development, whether through training, mentorship, or the chance to take on new responsibilities. This means they play an important role in the third key factor.

Growth opportunities, including development and advancement

Opportunities cited include stretch assignments, career advancement and promotion, having a professional development plan, new challenges, and sponsorship, both formal and informal. As we noted above, in some cases respondents say that they are seeking out these opportunities, while others cite opportunities that were provided to them by their leaders, sponsors, and mentors.

These results provide additional context to our findings from last year that both managers and individuals play a role in thriving. From stretch assignments and promotions to supportive leaders who inspire and empower, the environment matters—but so does personal initiative.



What are the barriers to thriving?



Key findings:

Poor communication, lack of transparency, and ineffective leadership are major barriers to thriving at work, along with internal factors and organizational change

“Belonging is everything, but it requires thoughtful strategy by organizations to cultivate it as much as it requires individuals to initiate it.”

– 2024 Survey Participant

In analyzing the responses to the question “What gets in the way of your ability to thrive at work?” two interrelated themes rose to the top:

Poor communication and lack of transparency

This theme includes ineffective, unclear, infrequent, or non-existent communication, as well as a lack of transparency about expectations, roles, organizational change, priorities and vision for the future.

Problematic Actions from Managers

As the shadow side of our previous finding on the importance of good management, negative leadership behaviors ranged from micromanaging, inefficiency, and conflict avoidance to tolerating or enacting disrespect, favoritism, bullying and “rampant sexism and discrimination.”

Since clear and transparent communication is one of the key responsibilities of managers and leaders, taken together these two themes clearly demonstrate the importance of ensuring people leaders have the training, skills, and emotional intelligence to support their teams, and that they are held accountable both for their results and for how they achieve those results.



As in our previous study, workload and work life balance were also cited as barriers to thriving by a significant number of our respondents. Two other themes are worth noting:

Internal factors, including self doubt, imposter syndrome, lack of confidence, and fear of failure

Organizational change, chaos, and uncertainty, including lack of clarity around goals, roles, and expectations

For those who feel like they are thriving less than they were a year ago, organizational change was the most common factor responsible for that change, followed by their management or leadership.

These findings emphasize that fostering a thriving workforce requires leaders who prioritize communication, foster belonging, and create a healthy team environment.

“To me, the tone is really set by your leader - if they are supportive, interested and committed to shared success, and can be specific about what that will look like once achieved, I am more inclined to lean in and be part of the solution and ensuring our organization thrives now and going forward.”

– 2024 Survey Participant



Thriving in Action Tools for Individuals, Leaders, and Organizations

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

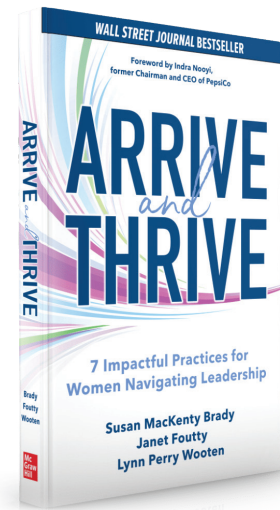
TOOLS FOR INDIVIDUALS

Take action based on what you can control.

Follow the example of our respondents - take responsibility for your own development, mindset, and wellbeing. If you are ready for a new role or opportunity, go after it.

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

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



Learn more about the practices:
arriveandthrive.com



Better Understanding Podcast

It all begins with understanding ourselves and understanding others.

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

TOOLS FOR LEADERS

Communicate frequently and with transparency

As we noted above, the most frequently cited factor that gets in the way of employees thriving is lack of communication and lack of transparency. Think about how you can increase both the frequency and transparency of your communication, and how you can take advantage of all of the channels available (group meetings, 1-1 meetings, emails, group messaging, etc.).

Provide support for your employees

Supportive leadership was one of the key factors employees cited in their feeling of thriving. Check in with your team members and ask what they need from you in order to feel supported.

Ensure you are providing frequent, actionable feedback. Many of our respondents noted the importance of feedback in helping them feel they were having a meaningful impact, learning and growing, which are critical components of thriving.

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

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

More details on all of these practices can be found in *Arrive and Thrive*.



TOOLS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Demonstrate your commitment

The key predictors for our respondents' anticipating that they will thrive next year is their perception of the organization's commitment, both in the past and expected for the future.

Our survey respondents cite these top three ways organizations can demonstrate commitment:

1. Provide resources and tools so staff can work in a sustainable way
2. Discuss thriving in organization wide communications
3. Publicly recognize teams that are working in a way that allows team members to thrive

In addition, consider:

1. Share best practices for thriving
2. Provide an EAP that contributes to my ability to thrive
3. Support people to use their PTO

Ultimately, thriving at work is not just a personal achievement but an organizational one. By addressing the barriers that limit thriving and focusing on the key enablers—strong leadership, clear communication, and a commitment to individual growth—companies can unlock the full potential of their workforce.

As we move forward, it's clear that thriving must be seen as an ongoing commitment by both leaders and organizations to create sustainable, supportive environments where everyone can truly excel.

IRB approval was not obtained for collection of this data.

“I think a lot of organizations are talking about thriving and psychological safety - but in reality as the world is facing turbulent times, this is just talk and people revert to self preservation - which is not always positive.”

– 2024 Survey Participant

AUTHOR

ELISA VAN DAM

Vice President, Allyship & Inclusion, Simmons University Institute for Inclusive Leadership

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

SUSAN MACKENTY BRADY

CEO, Simmons University Institute for Inclusive Leadership

Susan is the Deloitte Ellen Gabriel Chair for Women and Leadership at Simmons University and the first Chief Executive Officer of The Simmons University Institute for Inclusive Leadership.

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



ABOUT US

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

Learn more:

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

Thriving *at Work*

This comprehensive report explores what it means to thrive at work, and how managers, individuals and organizations can create circumstances that allow employees to thrive. Based on the results of a survey with over 490 respondents, we provide new insights on the benefits and challenges of fostering thriving at work.

This report also launches our new Thrive Index™ which measures if participants are thriving on a scale from 1 = never thriving to 5 = always thriving.



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