

# We Aim to Thrive at Work, but We Need to Improve Our Attention First: Towards a Resourceful Work Climate that Facilitates Attention Effectiveness



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## Abstract

Thriving employees have a significant societal impact in today's work environment characterized by complexity and uncertainty. Despite the gaps in understanding what enables thriving individuals, what we know is that, attention effectiveness is a critical predictor of performance and well-being behaviors. Some promising interventions and tools facilitate attention effectiveness and improved performance and well-being, contributing to sustainable employability characterized thriving employees who proactively and consistently to pursue learning and health-related activities beyond mere satisfaction and efficiency. This article emphasizes the importance of creating conditions for a resourceful work climate to attract and retain thriving individuals. It advocates for an agile approach to using and combining different resources in attention effectiveness, such as yoga, coaching, AI, and vital physical conditions, to facilitate sustainable employability.

**Keywords:** Yoga; Coaching; AI; Vital Workplace; Sustainable; Performance; Thriving

## Introduction

The primary goal for organizations and society is to ensure thriving individuals, which is assumed to yield heightened productivity. However, efficient organizations nowadays face substantial societal hurdles tied to an aging population, workforce diversity, and escalating rates of burnout. To tackle these challenges, the emphasis should be on prioritizing the conditions for a resourceful work climate and a workforce characterized by lifelong employability and enduring performance - a thriving workforce [23].

A thriving workforce is characterized by satisfied and efficient employees who proactively and consistently pursue learning and health-related activities to reach high levels of performance and well-being [23]. However, this is challenging to achieve in the current stressful and ongoing changing work environment landscape [1]. This is partially because we all struggle with a critical resource for performance and well-being behaviors: attention. The variety of addictive content delivery instruments, such as emails, news, and social media, as well as unhealthy practices and a lack of

regulation, deplete our attention. Attention is a limited cognitive resource that bridges between ability and motivation. It explains the impact of task characteristics on ability and motivation-performance relations [2]. Attention effectiveness is significantly predicted by early perceptual selection and late cognitive control mechanisms [2]. A consistent body of research suggests that the ability to control attention, particularly in situations with competing demands and having motivations or goals for enacting it, significantly influences an individual's performance on complex working tasks [3,4]. However, despite this evidence, attention training, management, and facilitation have not become central to organizations' processes and interventions.

This article aims to shift organizations, researchers, and practitioners' focus to the role of different job resources in attention effectiveness and their power in creating the conditions for employees' task performance and well-being, as well as further sustainable performance. Moreover, it advocates for a resourceful work climate characterized by an agile approach to using and

combining different practices, interventions, and tools to facilitate thriving individuals.

- **Towards A Resourceful Work Climate**

How we train and manage attention, the goal-setting strategies and actions, and organizational context become critical ingredients for our adaptability and thriving in a fast-changing environment. Moreover, it can be anticipated that organizations prioritizing a sustainable work system that involves sufficient job resources, personal resources, and recovery opportunities to meet work demands would reap benefits in attracting and retaining essential thriving individuals [23]. Providing individualized tools for training attention (e.g., yoga), learning and development (e.g., coaching), monitoring and measuring (e.g., AI), and vital physical work conditions would have a significant impact on the type of work one performs (less tedious and redundant tasks and more meaningful ones), preventing any organization from fluctuating performances while helping them provide conditions for thriving employees.

- **Yoga - Training Attention**

Attention is a trainable human faculty [5] and can be used intentionally to build self-awareness [6], improve well-being [7], and enhance stress adaptation [8]. The research provides evidence that certain practices, such as meditation and yoga, can enhance attentional skills, allowing individuals to concentrate more intensely and switch between objects of attention more fluidly [9]. Yoga, in any format, promotes mindfulness and relaxation, which naturally activates the parasympathetic system and relaxation response, contrasting with the fight-or-flight/sympathetic nervous system [10]. Individuals can achieve inner and outer balance by focusing on breath and body [11]. Potential factors contributing to decreased emotional distress related to tasks may involve heightened body awareness, leading to intentional relaxation upon noticing tension, and adopting more effective task-performance strategies [10]. For instance, focusing on one task at a time can reduce demands on working memory, resulting in increased confidence, diminished stress levels, and reduced likelihood of job burnout [12,13], essential prerequisites for performance improvement. However, yoga and meditation in isolation from other job resources might not be enough. Having the resources for controlling attention will not guarantee that an individual will choose to use them to improve his performance and well-being. Different complementary resources are needed to facilitate sustainable performance.

- **Coaching - Attention Management for Learning and Goal Achievement**

Achieving task performance and well-being involves not only attention control. It also requires selective attention, which means concentrating on relevant stimuli while disregarding distractions. Research demonstrates that a high load on cognitive control processes, such as working memory and task coordination,

increases distractor interference [14] and suggests flexibly regulating cognitive effort to achieve goals [15]. One strategy is filtering the information, keeping the one with the most significant utility [16], and overcoming the limitations of our working memory through collaboration [17]. Coaching serves as a job resource that could alleviate some of the problems associated with multitasking by enhancing self-awareness of perceptual load and cognitive control, critical contributors to the efficiency of selective attention [14]. It is one of the most promising personalized interventions that facilitate goal-directed behaviors through improved self-awareness, focused interaction, goal-setting strategies, and tools that promote desirable and sustainable change for achieving professional and personal goals.

Workplace coaching has numerous benefits, including improved goal strategies and achievement, effective adaptation to change, and enhanced performance behaviors [18]. Moreover, the prospects of integrating mindfulness and yoga through health coaching to mitigate the impacts of agent stress and burn-out are encouraging, as a recent pilot study suggested [11]. Thus, coaching could be an augmented layer over other organizational practices for building job resources by providing clarity and guidance. However, it is a context-sensitive process, and organizational context (e.g., culture, reward system, information accessibility, technology, physical conditions) is one of the critical factors affecting its effectiveness. Therefore, it needs to be integrated into a more holistic approach to learning and development - a resourceful work climate.

- **AI - Monitoring and Measuring Attention**

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has sparked discussions about the potential transformation of the workplace landscape. The significant developments in AI urge the development of a human-centered AI that connects to humans, organizational/social context, and physical environment, helps and learns from humans, and collaborates with humans in a meaningful way, combining the specific strengths of AI with those of humans for a thriving society. Past literature argued that AI-based tools can enhance yoga and coaching practices and offer significant advantages, primarily stemming from their scalability, cost-effectiveness, and consistency [19, 20]. At the same time, the limitations relate primarily to the lack of empathy, emotional intelligence, and adaptability compared to humans [19].

In the current complex and uncertain organizational context, one could even imagine a personalized AI support system that provides them with control, advice, and accountability by combining psychological, contextual, and physical job resources from different processes (e.g., yoga, coaching, performance review, peer feedback) to improve their attention effectiveness and enhance performance and well-being. Apps could offer suggestions, ways for tracking and monitoring performance, and personalized feedback, enabling adjustments and improvements. Moreover, data sharing can promote health and performance by

encouraging collaboration across various stakeholders. Therefore, AI could augment other practices and build resources, leading to an enhanced, resourceful work climate.

## • Vital Workplace- Facilitating Successful Attention Management and Productivity

Researchers in health and physical activity and health professionals have given great attention to the concept of vitality [21]. It is a subjective construct that broadly refers to a feeling characterized by positive well-being, energy, fitness, and aliveness, encompassing mental and physical functioning [23,22]. In the broad sense, a vital environment should provide optimal conditions to improve and maintain external factors, such as good air and light quality, clean offices, sanitation, quiet places for different processes (e.g., high-level concentration work, yoga coaching), and good socio and organizational climate. The technology could facilitate novel and improved customized workplace design and personalization methods to sustain vitality at work. At the same time, social and environmental factors could constitute job resources, influencing how people adopt different practices (e.g., yoga, coaching) and facilitating the use of other job resources for sustainable behavior change and further sustainable performance.

## Conclusion

The societal impact of thriving employees is high, mainly due to the current complex and uncertain work environment landscape, characterized by aging, a more diverse workforce, and increasing rates of burnout. Organizations that create conditions for a resourceful work climate are expected to enjoy the reputation of attracting and retaining thriving individuals. There are still many gaps in the empirical knowledge and practice about what enables a thriving workforce that actively seeks continuous learning to acquire new skills and knowledge beyond mere satisfaction and efficiency. What is certain is that attention is critical for performance and well-being, and organizations prioritizing a working system that provides employees with enough job resources and opportunities for recovery would enable sustainable employability. Therefore, this article advocates for using an agile approach by identifying, combining, and capitalizing on the most promising personalized intervention for training attention (e.g., yoga), learning and development (e.g., coaching), technologies (e.g., AI), and physical conditions for facilitating thriving employees.

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