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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Sustaining employees thriving at work through polychronicity and work engagement: The unintended (negative) consequence of training

Michael Asiedu Gyensare<sup>1,2</sup>  | Gbemisola Soetan<sup>3</sup> | Chidiebere Ogbonnaya<sup>4</sup>  |  
Joan-Ark Agyapong<sup>4,5</sup> | Hamid Roodbari<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Kent, Canterbury, UK

<sup>2</sup>Oxford Business College, London, UK

<sup>3</sup>Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia

<sup>4</sup>King's College London, Strand, UK

<sup>5</sup>University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

<sup>6</sup>University of Surrey, Guildford, UK

## Correspondence

Chidiebere Ogbonnaya, King's College London,  
Strand, London, UK.

Email: [chidiebere.ogbonnaya@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:chidiebere.ogbonnaya@kcl.ac.uk)

## Abstract

Research on thriving has garnered significant scholarly attention. Yet, knowledge is lacking on the role that polychronicity plays in leveraging the hard work and dedication of frontline employees to acquire and utilize new knowledge and skill sets needed to thrive at work, and the condition under which this is expected to occur. We draw on the socially embedded model of thriving to examine how frontline employees' polychronic proclivities elicit their thriving at work (i.e. learning) through work engagement mechanism and the boundary condition of the unintended (negative) consequence of training. We examine our hypotheses based on a unique multi-wave and multi-source data from 261 frontline hotel employees and their colleagues in 10 four-star hotels in Ghana. Results indicate polychronicity's direct and indirect (via work engagement) effect on the learning facet of thriving at work. The strength of the direct effect of polychronicity on work engagement is offset and the indirect effect is attenuated by the unintended (negative) effect of the training frontline employees receive from their hotel organizations. Implications for theory and practice are discussed, with limitations and several suggestions made for future research endeavours.

## KEYWORDS

polychronicity, socially embedded model, thriving, training, work engagement

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## INTRODUCTION

The hospitality and tourism sector represents a strong pillar of the global economy, particularly in fast-rising developing economies, such as Ghana. The sector's contributions are reliant on the efforts and loyalty of its frontline employees who provide high-quality services to meet the growing customer needs (Agnihotri et al., 2017; Karatepe et al., 2014). Therefore, it is essential for scholars and practitioners to have a deeper understanding of how frontline employees self-adapt and acclimatize to the intricacies of the contemporary work context.

A critical concept of adaptation and positive adjustment of employees that supports their attunement to the work environment is thriving (Pichler et al., 2023; Spreitzer et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2018). Thriving (i.e. a 'psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and learning at work'; Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 538) is essential in the hospitality and tourism sector because it is 'an adaptive function that helps [frontline employees] navigate and change their work contexts to promote their own development' (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 537). A central tenet of thriving at work is that the vitality and learning facets work together (Porath et al., 2012), and high levels of both imply employee thriving at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005). While vitality is the positive feelings of energy and 'aliveness', learning represents the sense of obtaining and using valuable skills and knowledge (Porath et al., 2022; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Learning is the cognitive component of thriving, characterized by a state of perpetual improvement achieved through the acquisition and application of knowledge (Dimitrova, 2020). Therefore, through learning, we argue that thriving completely captures the 'forward movement in one's development' (Spreitzer et al., 2010, p. 135) and 'psychological experience of personal growth' (Porath et al., 2012, p. 251). Consequently, we posit that learning can serve as an internal gauge assisting employees to evaluate whether their work context is favourable for their professional growth and development (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

Although research on thriving has garnered much scholarly attention (see Goh et al., 2022; Kleine et al., 2019; Porath et al., 2022 for recent reviews) and has been associated with important work outcomes, such as less career regret, more commitment and satisfaction, and the willingness to engage in both in-role and extra-role behaviours (Han & Hwang, 2021a, 2021b; Huo, 2021; Wu & Chen, 2019), it is unclear whether individuals' *preference* to handle several tasks concurrently (i.e. polychronicity; Arndt et al., 2006; Sanderson et al., 2013), could enable or inhibit hotel employees thriving. Research investigating the potential relationship between polychronicity and frontline service employees thriving at work is essential considering the highly demanding and fast-paced work environment in the hotel industry (Asghar et al., 2021; Jang & George, 2012; Karatepe et al., 2013). However, while an analysis of the hospitality and tourism literature (see Table A1) indicates that individual characteristics enable workplace thriving (Goh et al., 2022; Kleine et al., 2019; Spreitzer et al., 2005), we know little about how polychronicity—'an important employee trait that has specific and clear relevance to the eclectic and fast-paced' (Arndt et al., 2006, p. 320) work environment in the hotel industry (Asghar et al., 2021; Jang & George, 2012; Karatepe et al., 2013)—can help sustain frontline hotel employees thriving. Polychronicity is a stable personality trait that describes the *preference* for multitasking rather than single-tasking behaviour (Howard & Cogswell, 2023). As such, polychronicity holds importance in the hospitality and tourism sector because of the high demand on frontline hotel employees to engage in diverse and multiple tasks, interact with customers and work under time constraints (Asghar et al., 2021; Jang & George, 2012; Karatepe et al., 2013; Slocombe & Bluedorn, 1999).

Additionally, while past research has determined a positive association between polychronicity and work engagement (Asghar et al., 2020; Karatepe et al., 2013) and work engagement and thriving at work (Rabiul et al., 2023; Wallace et al., 2016), the work engagement mechanism channelling the positive effect of polychronicity to workplace thriving remains unclear due to its positionality in the thriving literature. However, Kleine et al. (2019) note that the dominant explanation in the thriving literature foregrounds engagement as a driver rather than a consequence of thriving. This tension motivated us to postulate that polychronicity facilitates high levels of work engagement derived from the *preference*

to engage in several tasks and switch between tasks, which, in turn, leads to a high sense of learning resulting in thriving at work.

The socially embedded model of thriving suggests that thriving is influenced and sustained by the interplay between individual and contextual factors (Goh et al., 2022; Kleine et al., 2019). The model also recognizes that employees may vary in their thriving because of differences in individual and contextual factors that nourish their flourishing behaviours. From the lens of the socially embedded model of thriving, we reason that contextual factors play a crucial role in establishing how employees can reach their full potential (Cheng et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2024; Spreitzer et al., 2012). However, the thriving literature lacks a clear and logical explanation of how training, an important contextual factor, acts as a moderator in this process. Moreover, the way employees perceive and undergo training might influence the relationship between their *preference* to juggle through several tasks and their work engagement, and subsequent thriving at work. Training, while designed to enhance knowledge, skills and abilities, can inadvertently require employees to invest too much time and effort, resulting in negative consequences, such as stress and burnout, which can undermine the positive effect of polychronicity on work engagement (Han et al., 2020; Jensen et al., 2013; Kroon et al., 2009). The overlooked aspect of training, as highlighted in extant research (Livne-Ofer et al., 2019; Van de Voorde & Beijer, 2015), constrains our theoretical understanding of the circumstances in which the preference to engage in several things at the same time impedes the work engagement and thriving of frontline hotel employees. Based on the foregoing reasons, we employed the socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005) to propose and examine a model in which the direct and indirect (via work engagement) effect of polychronicity on thriving is moderated by the unintended (negative) effect of training.

In developing and testing our theoretical model, we make several contributions to the thriving and polychronicity literature. First, recognizing a gap in the extant research focused primarily on contextual antecedents of thriving (Chang & Busser, 2020; Han & Hwang, 2021b; Lin et al., 2022; Wu & Chen, 2019), we respond to recent calls urging the exploration of individual characteristics that facilitate thriving at work (Goh et al., 2022; Kleine et al., 2019). In this regard, by examining polychronicity as a factor enabling workplace thriving, we highlight the *preference* for doing several things simultaneously as a trait relevant to the dynamic, multifaceted hospitality industry environment (Arndt et al., 2006; Karatepe et al., 2013). This personality trait aligns with the domain of individual characteristics influencing workplace thriving and expands the utility of the socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005) in the field of hospitality and tourism literature (Chang & Busser, 2020; Huo, 2021). Second, we deepen understanding of the link between polychronicity and workplace thriving by investigating work engagement as a motivational pathway. In so doing, we contribute to the emerging body of research on polychronicity (Asghar et al., 2020; Karatepe et al., 2013) and unravel the conceptual muddling surrounding the positionality of engagement in the thriving literature (Kleine et al., 2019; Wallace et al., 2016).

Third, our study addresses the unintended (negative) consequence of training as a boundary condition of the relationship between polychronicity, work engagement and subsequently thriving at work. In response to calls for identifying contextual moderators stimulating thriving (Cheng et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2024; Walumbwa et al., 2018), we shed light on the unintended (negative) consequence of skill training for polychronic individuals. Despite the potential of multitasking *preference* to foster engagement and thriving among frontline employees (Asghar et al., 2020; Karatepe et al., 2013; Sanderson et al., 2013), we reason that training could generate a detrimental effect to dampen this relationship. The increased time and effort demanded by skill training sessions might create additional tasks, intensifying work pressure and extending work hours (Han et al., 2020; Kroon et al., 2009; Page et al., 2018). As such, employees may perceive training as a misuse of their time and effort required to engage in polychronic tendencies (Livne-Ofer et al., 2019; Van de Voorde & Beijer, 2015), thus hindering their enthusiasm and engagement in their assigned work roles (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Lesener et al., 2020) and ultimately inhibiting their workplace thriving.

## THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

### Socially embedded model of thriving and polychronicity

In this section, we begin by describing Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) socially embedded model of thriving, which provides the theoretical foundation for our hypotheses. The socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005) identifies two categories of antecedents, including personality dispositions (e.g. core self-evaluation, proactive personality and positive affect) and contextual factors (e.g. social support, climate of trust and task identity) that can facilitate thriving. Since advancing these two categories of enablers, the socially embedded model of thriving has been adopted as a framework to explicate how employees develop and sustain their thriving (Goh et al., 2022; Kleine et al., 2019; Porath et al., 2022; Spreitzer et al., 2005). The underpinning assumption of the socially embedded model of thriving is that personality dispositions and contextual factors enable individuals to become agentic. In turn, these agentic behaviours (i.e. task focus, exploration and heedful relating) not only serve as the engine of the socially embedded model of thriving but also help employees to learn at work.

Extant research in the hospitality and tourism sector shows that empirical studies on the contextual enablers of thriving has proliferated (Chang & Busser, 2020; Han & Hwang, 2021a, 2021b; Kleine et al., 2019; Wu & Chen, 2019), limiting our understanding of similar research on individual characteristics that predispose some employees to thrive more than others (Spreitzer et al., 2005). However, recent reviews have outlined proactive personality, prosocial motivation, emotional stability and core self-evaluation among others as the individual characteristics that antecede workplace thriving (Goh et al., 2022). While these personality dispositions are important enablers of thriving at work, the thriving research misses out on an 'important employee trait [polychronicity] that has specific and clear relevance to the eclectic and fast-paced' (Arndt et al., 2006, p. 320) work environment in the hotel industry where frontline employees prefer to juggle through several tasks in a block of time (Karatepe et al., 2013; Sanderson et al., 2013). For example, frontline hotel managers engage in several activities, including supervising receptionists and resolving conflicts from guests on phone all at the same time, making polychronicity a preferable trait in the hospitality industry.

Polychronicity describes the degree to which employees prefer to engage in several tasks at a time-block and believe their *preference* is the best route for carrying out the tasks (Bluedorn et al., 1999; Sanderson et al., 2013). While polychronicity has intrigued both scholars and practitioners, this trait-like affinity for preferring to allocate time to do several things simultaneously (Franczak et al., 2024; Hall, 1983) does not equate multitasking ability (Howard & Cogswell, 2023; Konig & Waller, 2010; Sanderson et al., 2013). To provide conceptual clarity, Konig and Waller (2010) suggest that 'the term polychronicity should only be used to describe the *preference* for doing several things at the same time, while the behavioural aspect of polychronicity should be referred to as multitasking' (p. 175). For instance, Kirchberg et al. (2015) and more recently Howard and Cogswell (2023) have determined polychronicity as an antecedent of multitasking behaviour.

In our conceptual development of the polychronicity construct, we differentiate it from related individual characteristics, such as proactive personality and adaptation. First, polychronicity is distinct from proactive personality because the latter focuses on self-initiative and identification of opportunities for change (Conte & Gintoft, 2005; Howard & Cogswell, 2023). A proactive personality is characterized by self-initiation, the ability to effect change in oneself or one's environment which focuses on future outcomes rather than reactive responses (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Parker et al., 2010). It explicates how individuals exert control and initiate actions in the workplace (Parker et al., 2019, p. 222). Polychronicity pertains to the organization of time. Polychronic employees may seem proactive because of their engagement in multiple tasks (Franczak et al., 2024). However, their motivation does not inherently focus on fostering change. An employee exhibiting proactivity may favour sequential task management over the *preference* for multiple tasks. Second, polychronicity is conceptually different from adaptability. Adaptability refers to employees' capacity to modify their behaviour in response to evolving workplace conditions (Pichler et al., 2023). It assists employees in making appropriate adjustments at work to enhance the

significance of their roles (Hobfoll, 2002). Although polychronic employees may exhibit adaptability in the workplace, the key distinction is that polychronicity emphasizes *preferences* for managing multiple tasks, while adaptability relates to flexibility and responsiveness to changes in the work conditions.

Polychronic employees are capable of problem-solving in high-speed work contexts, such as the hotel industry because of their natural *preference* to carry out several tasks at the same time (Asghar et al., 2020; Jang & George, 2012). Polychronicity has been associated with well-being (Howard & Cogswell, 2023; Korabik et al., 2017; Weintraub et al., 2019), which calls for research on *how* and *when* polychronicity elicits frontline hotel employees thriving at work in high-speed work contexts. Against this backdrop, we seek to extend the socially embedded model of thriving by conceptualizing polychronicity as an innate trait-like affinity that describes time-oriented characteristics and explains frontline employees' preference for doing different tasks simultaneously. In doing so, we add to the individual characteristics domain of thriving and examine the process mechanisms through which the polychronicity and thriving at work relationship is expected to occur. Our conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

### Polychronicity and thriving at work relationship

We now turn our attention to examine the situation in which employees' *preference* for managing multiple tasks makes it easier for them to learn new skills and knowledge, resulting in thriving at work. The socially embedded model of thriving posits that thriving at work is intricately linked to the interplay between individual attributes and contextual factors within the organizational setting (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Within this framework, the positive relationship between polychronicity and employees thriving at work can be elucidated by the model's emphasis on the interaction between individual characteristics and the social environment. Although not extensively explored in the context of workplace thriving, polychronicity feeds into Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) socially embedded model of thriving and offers insights into how service employees' *preferences* for several things in multitasking environments can help them to thrive at work. The *preference* for engaging and switching between several tasks efficiently (i.e. polychronicity; Bluedorn et al., 1999) represents an important individual attribute contributing to thriving (Howard & Cogswell, 2023; Mattarelli et al., 2015). For example, a frontline receptionist may be called upon to check in on new guests and help resolve their complaints on the phone at the same time. This makes the *preference* for doing several tasks and allocating time for each task (Sanderson

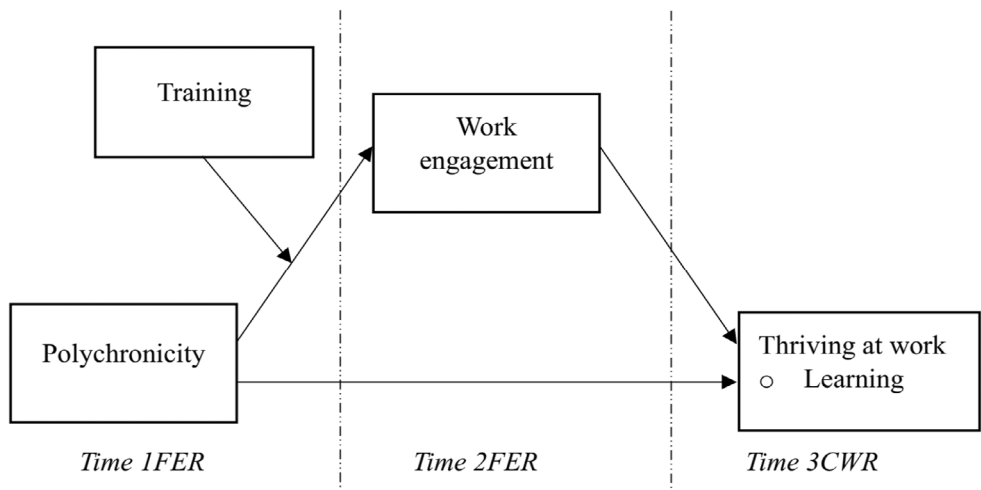


FIGURE 1 Proposed research model. CWR, coworker rating; FER, focal employee rating.

et al., 2013) essential for the contextual demands of customer-centric roles, which can facilitate the acquisition and application of new skills for successful task management and service delivery (Asghar et al., 2020; Karatepe, 2011).

Furthermore, in line with research emphasizing the importance of individual predispositions on thriving, such as aspiration for gain or proactivity (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Goh et al., 2022; Kleine et al., 2019), polychronic individuals possess attributes that predispose them towards enhanced thriving experiences within the highly demanding hospitality sector. While polychronicity does not necessarily equate multitasking, it encapsulates a preference for managing and shifting between numerous tasks within a defined timeframe (Howard & Cogswell, 2023; Sanderson et al., 2013). This inherent preference to handle several tasks allows polychronic individuals to efficiently allocate time and manage diverse responsibilities within a given timeframe enabling them to acquire and apply new set of skills essential for work (Arndt et al., 2006; Bluedorn et al., 1999; Karatepe et al., 2013). Such competencies align with service-oriented roles where meeting managerial and customer expectations necessitate agility and adaptability, enabling polychronic individuals to thrive at work by delivering quality service (Asghar et al., 2020; Jang & George, 2012; Karatepe, 2011).

In sum, we draw on the socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005) to propose that the unique attributes of polychronic individuals position them favourably to excel within the hospitality work settings. Their *preference* for and adeptness in managing several tasks within time constraints will likely facilitate the acquisition and utilization of a new set of skills, which are pivotal for successful service delivery (Benabou, 1999; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Consequently, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 1.** Polychronicity is positively associated with the learning facet of thriving at work.

## Work engagement as a mediator of the relationship between polychronicity and thriving at work

Although we predict a positive relationship between polychronicity and employee thriving at work in our earlier discussion, uncovering the ‘black box’ in this relationship is essential. Here, we suggest work engagement as one such mechanism. Work engagement is ‘a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption’ (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). This means that engaged employees exhibit high levels of involvement and engrossment in their assigned jobs (Bledow et al., 2011; Makikangas et al., 2016). As a motivational construct, work engagement can be facilitated by personality dispositions because it is a more direct outcome of individual's personal resources (Bakker et al., 2023; Lesener et al., 2020; Park et al., 2019). We contend that polychronicity as an innate personality disposition with ‘specific and clear relevance to the eclectic and fast-paced’ (Arndt et al., 2006, p. 320) work environment in the hotel industry will be related to work engagement. As such, polychrons with the *preference* to engage in multiple tasks and switch between tasks (Sanderson et al., 2013) are likely to work harder, feel committed and happily engrossed in their assigned work roles (Bledow et al., 2011; Borst et al., 2020).

From a socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005) perspective, polychronicity—where individuals prefer to engage in diverse tasks or activities simultaneously—can positively relate to thriving through work engagement due to its intricate interplay with the social contexts within the workplace. Polychronicity enables individuals to navigate complex social environments by efficiently managing and integrating diverse tasks, interactions and responsibilities (Asghar et al., 2020; Franczak et al., 2024; Karatepe et al., 2013). This skill becomes instrumental for service workers in the hospitality industry where collaborative work, teamwork and interpersonal relationships are pivotal. The *preference* for engaging in multiple tasks concurrently fosters a sense of adaptability and flexibility, concurring with the socially embedded model of thriving's emphasis on the interconnectedness between individuals and their contextual environment (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Thus, as employees' adept in polychronicity navigate various work demands

surrounding the hospitality industry, they are more likely to be engaged, leveraging this preferential capability to establish meaningful connections.

Furthermore, the positive relationship between polychronicity and work engagement is also likely to stem from its facilitation of social interactions and relationships. Polychronic hotel employees exhibit effective time usage, enhanced communication skills and social acumen, enabling them to navigate diverse social and task-related situations (Asghar et al., 2021; Sanderson et al., 2013). This ability to synchronize and manage multiple activities concurrently fosters collaboration, cooperation and effective interaction with their customers, ultimately contributing to heightened levels of work engagement. Because polychronic employees prefer to juggle through several tasks in a block of time (Bluedorn et al., 1999; Sanderson et al., 2013), it is relatively easier for them to handle the complaints of disgruntled customers and the high volumes of special delivery requests (Jang & George, 2012; Karatepe et al., 2014). Given their natural *preference* to focus on several tasks within a limited time, polychronicity should impact hotel employees' hard work and dedication towards completing their assigned work roles. Thus, we suggest that polychrons would be more engaged at work.

In turn, as polychrons become more engaged in their work, we argue that they are more likely to experience a sense of learning—thriving at work (Porath et al., 2012). For example, research shows that when employees learn, they accumulate a stockpile of knowledge and skills that they can readily utilize in their work (Zeijan et al., 2020). Work engagement should enhance thriving within service environments due to its multifaceted impact on individual well-being and performance (Bakker et al., 2008). As a positive, energized state of mind encompassing dedication, absorption and vitality (Schaufeli et al., 2002), work engagement allows for profound emotional and energetic connection with work (Bakker et al., 2008; Zeijan et al., 2020). This heightened level of engagement should help individuals to learn, by building up a reservoir of knowledge and skillsets, contributing significantly to frontline employees' thriving at work. Indeed, according to Billett (2001), the intensity of engagement correlates directly with the quality and extent of learning experiences, providing employees with ongoing access to goal-directed activities and support, thereby facilitating continuous personal development (Dimitrova, 2020; Kleine et al., 2019). Through active involvement and enthusiasm for their tasks, engaged service employees not only experience a sense of fulfilment but also leverage their engagement as a catalyst for continual learning and growth (Makikangas et al., 2016; Zeijan et al., 2020).

Building from the above, we theorize engagement as a precursor rather than an outcome of thriving. First, meta-analysis on engagement has shown that work engagement is distinct from attitudinal constructs (e.g. job satisfaction and commitment) (Borst et al., 2020; Christian et al., 2011). In addition, work engagement is a motivational pathway for evaluating the impact of individual characteristics (including polychronicity) on thriving at work. Hence, riding on the shoulders of Kleine et al.'s (2019) meta-analytic findings, we challenge the conceptual acumen of Goh et al.'s (2022) integrative review and Rabiul et al.'s (2023) empirical evidence about engagement as an attitudinal outcome of thriving. Our contention is further cemented by a recent Gallup Report (2023) on the state of the global workplace which describes engagement as a gauge for assessing workplace thriving.

Accordingly, we reason that work engagement serves as a catalyst for employee thriving by facilitating an environment conducive to personal development and goal attainment (Kleine et al., 2019; Wallace et al., 2016). Engaged workers tend to immerse themselves deeply in their work, experiencing a flow state characterized by intense focus and absorption (Bakker et al., 2008). This absorption enables employees to effectively channel their skills and efforts towards achieving meaningful goals, creating a sense of zest and vitality. Furthermore, the energetic connection established through work engagement will likely propel service employees to seek and seize opportunities for skill enhancement and learning, fostering a continuous cycle of growth and development (Billett, 2001; Zeijan et al., 2020). Taken together, to the extent that polychrons prefer to manage several tasks simultaneously (Asghar et al., 2020), they should feel invigorated and connected to their work (i.e. become engaged), leading to enhanced thriving at work (Borst et al., 2020; Kleine et al., 2019; Wallace et al., 2016). As such, we theorize work engagement as a mediator that advances our understanding of the 'black box' between polychronicity and thriving at work:

**Hypothesis 1b.** Polychronicity is positively associated with work engagement.

**Hypothesis 2.** Work engagement mediates the positive linkage between polychronicity and learning facet of thriving at work.

## Training as a boundary condition

As described earlier, the socially embedded model of thriving emphasizes the significant role of contextual factors in realizing the full potential of employees thriving at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Within the socially embedded model of thriving framework, the interplay between individual characteristics and contextual factors significantly shapes the experience of workplace thriving (Jiang et al., 2024; Kleine et al., 2019). Guided by this perspective, we propose that training serves as a contextual factor that moderates the relationship between polychronicity and employee thriving through work engagement. Specifically, we suggest that frontline hotel employees high in polychronicity may experience reduced work engagement and subsequent decline in thriving when the demands of training compromise their ability to engage in multitasking and task switching comfortably within defined time blocks. This consideration introduces a nuanced understanding of training (Beltran-Martin et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2007) which contrasts its beneficial effects, including enhancing the capabilities of employees, boosting their self-confidence to have control over their work and increasing their proactivity in performing their assigned work roles (Ehrnrooth et al., 2021; Kostopoulos et al., 2015; Suseno et al., 2022).

Training, recognized as a fundamental HR practice for transferring knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) to employees (Blume et al., 2019; Garavan, McCarthy, Lai, Murphy, et al., 2021), aligns with the Dynamic Transfer Model (DTM), highlighting its aim to enhance on-the-job effectiveness (Blume et al., 2019). However, empirical evidence suggests that the instrumental value of training may be undermined when solely targeted at maximizing human capital without adequate consideration for employee well-being (Han et al., 2020; Jensen & Van de Voorde, 2016; Oppenauer & Van De Voorde, 2018; Ramsay et al., 2000). As noted by Ehrnrooth and Bjorkman (2012), this training approach could lead employees to feel depleted rather than empowered, potentially resulting in disengagement and increased work pressure (Van de Voorde et al., 2016). Therefore, training while intended to enhance skills and competencies, can unintentionally increase the job demands that employees experience, potentially leading to negative outcomes, such as burnout, counteracting the positive effects of polychronicity on work engagement (Han et al., 2020; Kroon et al., 2009).

Based on the above considerations, we propose that training moderates the positive effect of polychronicity on employees thriving at work through work engagement. When employees perceive training as resource-depleting, their polychronic *preference* and engagement diminishes, hindering their sense of learning, an essential facet of thriving at work (Porath et al., 2022; Spreitzer et al., 2012). In contrast, a balanced perception of training, seen as mutually beneficial, reinforces the *preference* for polychronic abilities, work engagement and the associated feelings of being energized and immersed in their roles, consequently enhancing employees' sense learning (Bledow et al., 2011; Park et al., 2019; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 3.** Training will moderate the positive effect of polychronicity on work engagement, such that the positive effect becomes negative when training is perceived as resource-depleting.

**Hypothesis 4.** Training will moderate the positive indirect effect of polychronicity on the learning facet of thriving at work via work engagement, such that the positive indirect effect is attenuated when training is perceived as resource-depleting.

## METHOD

### Empirical research rationale

An International Labour Organisation (2020) report indicated that COVID-19 posed a great challenge to employees in the hospitality and tourism sector due to border closures and travel restrictions. This left most frontline employees languishing—‘a sense of stagnation and emptiness’ (Dasborough, 2022, p. 167)—because of lack of work activities (Darkwah, 2022; Kimbu et al., 2023; Soane et al., 2023). Since thriving is the antipode of languishing, it makes sense to understand how hotel employees are adapting and positively adjusting to their normal work lives in the twin sectors after the pandemic. Second, the sector is characterized by intensive work which makes polychronicity—*time usage and the preference to juggle several tasks*—imperative. Therefore, the demand on frontline employees to prefer to engage in several blocks of tasks, engage in pleasant interaction with customers and work under rigorous time constraints, make polychronicity a beneficial trait for frontline employees in the hospitality and tourism sector (Asghar et al., 2021; Bluedorn et al., 1999; Karatepe et al., 2013). Based on the forgoing reasons, it is anticipated that multi-wave and multi-source data from four-star rated hotel employees in Ghana will help illuminate our understanding of *how* and *when* polychronic inclinations foster frontline employees thriving at work.

### Sample and procedure

Our study participants consisted of full-time frontline employees and their coworkers drawn from 10 four-star hotels in Ghana. Only full-time hotel employees and their colleagues who have worked with their current hotel for the six-month probation period were recruited (*Labour Act, 2003, Act 651*). Our rationale for selecting full-time employees in our sample was that past research has shown that part-time and full-time employees differ in their ratings of psychological well-being outcomes, including thriving (Conway & Briner, 2002). In addition, part-timers rather than full-timers prefer flexible work arrangements (Miller & Terborg, 1979; Yeo et al., 2024), which is likely to compromise their polychronic inclinations to excel in multitasking contexts. Because common method variance (CMV) is a precursor to common method bias (CMB) (Bozionelos & Simmering, 2022), multiple waves and multiple source data were used to mitigate the threat of CMB (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Furthermore, to encourage maximum participation, we assured participants of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.

At Time 1 (June 2023), the survey was distributed to 350 frontline hotel employees to respond to polychronicity, training and the covariates, which resulted in 316 responses. At Time 2 (July 2023), those who responded to the Time 1 survey were re-contacted to answer questions on work engagement, resulting in 290 surveys. During the Time 2 survey, the frontline employees were asked to provide the contact details of two working colleagues with whom they had worked for a period of 3 months and above.

We compiled the contact details of coworkers provided by the focal participants and randomly selected one coworker to respond to the survey in Time 3 (August 2023). Of the 290 randomly selected work colleagues, only 286 were contacted due to missing information. The 286 work colleagues answered questions on the learning dimension of thriving at work for the focal participants, resulting in 270 complete responses. The multi-wave and multi-source data were matched using unique codes, which resulted in 261 complete and matched responses. This represented a 74.6% response rate, above the average response rate of 52.7% suitable for conducting research based on employee data (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). Shown in Table 1, our sample consisted of approximately 82% female frontline workers. Most of the participants (51%) were single and aged between 26 and 33 years (58.6%). Finally, they have worked between 1 and 5 years (82.0%) and hold a diploma (78.5%) as their highest educational accomplishment.

TABLE 1 Sample demographic characteristics.

Characteristic/subgroup	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	45	17.2
Female	216	82.8
Participant age		
18–25 years	61	23.4
26–33 years	153	58.6
34–41 years	41	15.7
42–49 years	4	1.5
>49 years	2	.8
Tenure in organization		
1–5 years	214	82.0
6–10 years	36	13.8
>10 years	11	4.2
Marital status		
Single	133	51.0
Married	128	49.0
Highest level of education		
Diploma	205	78.5
Undergraduate	56	21.5

## Measures

### Polychronicity

Polychronicity ( $\alpha = .91$ ) was assessed with the 10-item inventory of polychronic value (IPV) scale (Bluedorn et al., 1999). The participants rated the 10-items on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Sample items are ‘I like to manage several activities at the same time’ and ‘I believe people should try to do many things at once’.

### Work engagement

Work engagement ( $\alpha = .96$ ) was measured with the short version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Survey (UWES-9; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). The nine items under three sub-dimensions were anchored on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 7 = *always* with sample items, including ‘at my work, I feel bursting with energy’ (*vigour*), ‘I am enthusiastic about my job’ (*dedication*) and ‘I am immersed in my work’ (*absorption*).

### Training

Training ( $\alpha = .86$ ) was assessed with four items from the high-performance human resource (HPHR) practices scale (Sun et al., 2007). Participants were made to rate the items on a 5-point scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. A sample item is ‘my hotel offers extensive training programmes for individuals in customer contact or frontline jobs’.

## Thriving at work

Thriving at work was measured with the 5-item learning scale (Porath et al., 2012) on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. A sample item is 'I see myself continually improving' (*learning* =  $\alpha = .94$ ). In line with recent recommendations (Kleine et al., 2019), we omitted the vitality dimension of thriving in our analysis to rule out construct similarity with the vigour items of work engagement given both constructs were highly correlated, suggesting concern for multicollinearity.

## Control variables

Following past research (Han & Hwang, 2021a, 2021b; Jang & George, 2012), we controlled frontline hotel employees' age, gender, marital status, tenure in the organization and educational accomplishment. This is because these covariates have been found to be associated with work engagement and thriving (Asghar et al., 2021; Karatepe et al., 2013; Wu & Chen, 2019).

## RESULTS

### Confirmatory factor analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the maximum likelihood (ML) estimate in AMOS v.29 (Arbuckle, 2022) was used to assess the validity and reliability of the measures (Table 2). To test for discriminant validity, a series of nested models were performed for comparison. As reported in Table 3, the hypothesized four-factor model (i.e. polychronicity, training, work engagement and learning) resulted in a good fit ( $\chi^2[N=262, df=308]=754.47, \chi^2/df=2.45, TLI=.92, CFI=.93, RMSEA=.08, SRMR=.05$ ) compared with the alternative models, with the closest being the three-factor model with work engagement and learning combined ( $\chi^2[N=262, df=311]=1065.87, \chi^2/df=3.43, TLI=.87, CFI=.88, RMSEA=.10, SRMR=.06$ ). Also, the 90% CI for RMSEA parameters were inspected with no observation of overlap in the data, suggesting the distinctiveness of the measures. The factor loadings (see Table 2) for the polychronicity (.52–.82), training (.73–.85), work engagement (.78–.92) and learning (.80–.92) constructs were all above the suggested score ( $\geq .50$ ; Hair Jr. et al., 2019), signifying convergent validity. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), maximum reliability (MaxR) and Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for the multi-item constructs (see Table 2) met their recommended threshold value of  $\geq .50, \geq .60$  and  $\geq .70$ , respectively (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012; Hair Jr. et al., 2019), signifying all constructs are valid and reliable (Tables 2 and 3).

### Hypothesis testing

We used the kurtosis and skewness indices, and the variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance scores to address the assumption of normality and multicollinearity. The highest kurtosis |.52| and skewness |1.12| scores in Table 2 were less than |3.0| (Kline, 2016) while the VIF (1.76–2.17) and tolerance (.46–.57) indices in Table 4 were less than 4.0 and greater than .10, respectively (O'Brien, 2007), indicating that our data are normally distributed and not affected by collinearity issues.

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics and correlations among the study constructs. Model 7 of Hayes (2022) PROCESS macro was utilized to test the hypothesized moderated mediation model, while Model 4 was used to examine the indirect effect of polychronicity on the learning dimension of thriving through work engagement.

As hypothesized in Table 5, polychronicity was positively and significantly associated with learning ( $\beta = .36, SE = .15, p < .05$ ), thus lending support to Hypothesis 1a. In a similar vein, polychronicity

TABLE 2 Reliability and validity assessment.

Constructs, details of measures and results of reliability and validity test	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	$\lambda$	t-Value
Polychronicity (Bluedorn et al., 1999; CR = .91, MaxR(H) = .92, AVE = .51)						
POL1. I like to manage several activities at the same time	3.73	.97	−.56	−.21	.76	Fixed
POL2. I would rather complete an entire task everyday than complete parts of several projects	3.75	.91	−.67	.14	.82	13.67
POL3. I believe people should try to do many things at once	3.64	.98	−.68	.15	.76	12.60
POL4. When I work by myself, I usually work on one task at a time	3.77	.93	−.41	−.52	.74	12.31
POL5. I prefer to do one thing at a time	3.67	.94	−.52	−.12	.70	11.35
POL6. I believe people do their best work when they have many tasks to complete	3.66	.96	−.62	−.05	.72	11.78
POL7. I believe it is best to complete one task before beginning another	3.77	.88	−.60	.08	.67	10.99
POL8. I believe it is best for people to be given several tasks and assignments to perform	3.69	.97	−.71	−.01	.75	12.25
POL9. I seldom like to work on more than a single task or assignment at the same time	3.71	.87	−.51	.14	.66	10.72
POL10. I would rather complete parts of several projects every day than complete an entire task	3.66	1.20	−.80	−.21	.52	8.28
Training (Sun et al., 2007; CR = .86, MaxR(H) = .87, AVE = .60)						
ETR1. Extensive training programmes are provided for employees in customer contact or frontline jobs	3.67	1.04	−.58	−.42	.85	Fixed
ETR2. Employees in customer contact jobs will normally go through training programmes every few years	3.76	1.04	−.70	−.05	.78	14.23
ETR3. There are formal training programmes to teach new hires the skills they need to perform their job	3.72	.91	−.56	.10	.74	13.15
ETR4. Formal training programmes are offered to employees to increase their promotability in this organization	3.87	.95	−.69	−.01	.73	12.55
Work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003; CR = .96, MaxR(H) = .96, AVE = .74)						
ENG1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy	5.12	1.62	−.99	−.09	.78	Fixed
ENG2. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous	5.18	1.65	−1.07	.17	.81	18.14
ENG3. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	5.21	1.62	−1.04	.26	.87	18.40
ENG4. I am enthusiastic about my job	5.23	1.30	−1.12	.31	.92	17.18
ENG5. My job inspires me	5.23	1.68	−1.05	.10	.80	14.39
ENG6. I am proud of the work that I do	5.22	1.48	−1.10	.42	.89	16.45
ENG7. I feel happy when I am working intensely	5.32	1.38	−1.05	.46	.90	16.63
ENG8. I am immersed in my work	5.37	1.43	−1.02	.38	.90	16.67
ENG9. I get carried away when I am work						
Thriving at work—learning (Porath et al., 2012; CR = .94, MaxR(H) = .95, AVE = .77)						
TWL1. I find myself learning often	5.20	1.36	−.88	−.04	.80	Fixed

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Constructs, details of measures and results of reliability and validity test	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	$\lambda$	t-Value
TWL2. I continue to learn more and more as time goes by	5.39	1.38	−.92	.39	.85	20.57
TWL3. I see myself continually improving	5.39	1.34	−.98	.40	.92	17.96
TWL4. I have developed a lot as a person	5.30	1.40	−.87	.02	.89	17.08
TWL5. I am not learning (R)	5.28	1.46	−.99	.16	.91	17.37

Note: Model fit statistics:  $\chi^2$ ( $N=261$ ,  $df=308$ ) = 754.47,  $\chi^2/df=2.45$ , TLI = .92, CFI = .93, SRMR = .05, RMSEA = .08.  $n=261$ , italicized items were omitted due to cross-loading.  
Abbreviations:  $\lambda$ , standardized factor loading; AVE, average variance extracted; CR, composite reliability; MaxR(H), maximum reliability; SD, standard deviation.

TABLE 3 Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results of the comparison of the hypothesized model with alternative nested models.

Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	RMSEA					$\chi^2$ difference test
					90% CI	SRMR	TLI	CFI	AIC	
Baseline four-factor model	754.47***	308	2.45	.08	[.07, .08]	.05	.92	.93	894.47	–
Three-factor model A	1065.87***	311	3.43	.10	[.09, .10]	.06	.87	.88	1199.89	$\Delta\chi^2(3)=311.40$ , $p<.001$
Three-factor model B	1256.05***	321	3.91	.11	[.10, .11]	.07	.84	.85	1370.05	$\Delta\chi^2(13)=501.53$ , $p<.001$
Three-factor model C	1307.20***	321	4.07	.11	[.10, .12]	.07	.83	.85	1421.20	$\Delta\chi^2(13)=552.73$ , $p<.001$
Two-factor model	1768.62***	323	5.48	.13	[.13, .14]	.09	.75	.77	1878.62	$\Delta\chi^2(15)=1014.15$ , $p<.001$
One-factor model	2152.35***	324	6.64	.15	[.14, .15]	.09	.69	.71	2260.35	$\Delta\chi^2(16)=1397.88$ , $p<.001$

Note:  $n=261$ .  $\chi^2(df)$  is based on comparison with the hypothesized five-factor model. Hypothesized five-factor model: polychronicity; training; work engagement; learning. Three-factor model A: polychronicity; training; work engagement and learning combined. Three-factor model B: polychronicity and training combined; work engagement; learning. Three-factor model C: polychronicity; training and work engagement combined; learning. Two-factor model: polychronicity, training and work engagement combined; learning. Two-factor model: all the multi-item constructs combined into a single latent construct.  
Abbreviations:  $\chi^2$ , chi-squared;  $\chi^2/df$ , normed chi-square; CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR, standardized root mean square residual; TLI, Tucker–Lewis index.  
\*\*\* $p<.001$ .

was found to be positively and significantly related to work engagement ( $\beta=.88$ ,  $SE=.11$ ,  $p<.001$ ), suggesting Hypothesis 1b is supported. Using the bootstrap technique, the indirect effects of polychronicity on learning (indirect effect = .40, 95% CI = [.31, .49]) through work engagement were positive and significant, providing support to Hypothesis 2. Furthermore, Hypothesis 3 posited that training would generate an unintended (negative) consequence on the positive effect of polychronicity on work engagement. As hypothesized in Table 5, the interaction effect between polychronicity and training was negatively associated with engagement ( $\beta=-.30$ ,  $SE=.10$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The results of the interaction plot in Figure 2a,b show that the link between polychronicity and work engagement hinges on how frontline hotel employees perceive training. Precisely, the JN plot indicates that polychronicity is significantly associated with work engagement when training is perceived as generating a negative effect—below 3.92 (correspond to 93% of the sample), which supports Hypothesis 3. To test Hypothesis 4, we conducted a first stage moderated mediation analysis with Model 7 of Hayes (2022) PROCESS macros, whereby the indirect effect of polychronicity on learning through

TABLE 4 Descriptive statistics, correlation and reliability estimates.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. T1 Gender	1.83	.38	1.00								
2. T1 Age	29.25	4.90	-.04	1.00							
3. T1 Tenure	3.47	2.64	.01	.43***	1.00						
4. T1 Marital status	1.49	.50	.16**	.55***	.27***	1.00					
5. T1 Highest level of education	1.21	.41	-.11 <sup>†</sup>	.30***	.20**	.25***	1.00				
6. T1 Polychronicity	3.70	.72	.15*	.24***	.17**	.34***	.05	.91			
7. T1 Training	3.76	.83	.16**	.24***	.21**	.26***	.12 <sup>†</sup>	.58***	.86		
8. T2 Work engagement	5.24	1.37	.15*	.16**	.16**	.25***	.07	.68***	.60***	.96	
9. T3 Thriving—learning	5.31	1.26	.17**	.19**	.17**	.28***	.02	.64***	.64***	.76***	.95
Variance inflation factor index	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	2.17	1.76	2.13	n.a
Tolerance index	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	.46	.57	.47	n.a

Note:  $n = 261$ . Cronbach's alphas are presented along the diagonal; Gender: 1 = male, 1 = female. Marital status: 1 = single, 2 = married. Education: 1 = diploma, 2 = undergraduate. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3. Bold values indicate along the diagonal represent the Cronbach's alpha values.  
Abbreviation: n.a, not applicable.  
<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ .  
\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

work engagement occurred at  $-1SD$  and  $+1SD$  levels of training. As shown in Table 5, the positive effect of polychronicity on learning through work engagement was stronger when training was lower ( $\beta = .60$ , 95% CI [.45, .76]) and weaker when training was higher ( $\beta = .36$ , 95% CI [.22, .52]). Furthermore, the index of moderated mediation was significant because it did not contain zero (indirect index =  $-.16$ , 95% CI  $[-.27, -.05]$ ). Therefore, we conclude that training attenuates the positive indirect effect of polychronicity on the learning dimension of thriving through work engagement, supporting Hypothesis 4. The findings of our hypotheses testing are illustrated in Figure 3.

## DISCUSSION

In a three-wave field study involving frontline hospitality employees, we found support for our hypotheses that polychronicity increases work engagement, which, in turn, is positively associated with frontline employees' thriving at work (i.e. learning; Porath et al., 2012). Furthermore, we demonstrated that this mediating process was moderated by the unintended (negative) effect of training. Specifically, polychronic employees who are subject to training were less likely to be engaged at work and, as a result, least likely to experience a sense of learning. In what follows, we discuss the theoretical and practical contributions of our research and provide suggestions for future research.

### Theoretical implications

Our research makes several important theoretical contributions to the literature on thriving at work and polychronicity. First, we contribute to the thriving literature (Spreitzer et al., 2005) by shedding new light on an important, yet overlooked individual characteristic contributing to thriving in the workplace, specifically polychronicity. For instance, employees high in polychronicity are likely to accrue new skills and knowledge to experience personal growth in their professional life (Dimitrova, 2020). Polychronicity is an essential aspect of today's dynamic work environment characterized by flexible

TABLE 5 Direct, moderation, mediation and moderated mediation models.

	Work engagement				Thriving—learning			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	LLCI	ULCI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Intercept	5.14***	.53	4.09	6.19	2.09***	.56	1.00	3.18
Control path								
Gender	.11	.17	−.23	.44	.12	.15	−.17	.42
Age	−.01	.02	−.04	.03	.00	.01	−.02	.03
Tenure in organization	.01	.02	−.04	.05	.02	.02	−.02	.05
Marital status	.03	.17	−.30	.36	.15	.14	−.13	.43
Highest level of education	.11	.19	−.27	.49	−.17	.12	−.40	.06
Direct effect path								
Polychronicity: H1a & H1b	.88***	.11	.66	1.11	.36*	.15	.07	.65
Work engagement					.54***	.06	.42	.66
Moderation effect path								
Training	.39**	.10	.19	.60				
Polychronicity × Training: H3	−.30*	.12	−.53	−.06				
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.55				.61			
					<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Mediation effect path								
Polychronicity → Work Engagement → Learning: H2					.40	.05	.31	.49
Moderated mediation effect path								
Polychronicity → Work Engagement → Learning: H4								
High training (+1SD)					.36	.08	.22	.52
Low training (−1SD)					.60	.08	.45	.76
Index of moderated mediation					−.16	.06	−.27	−.05

Note: *n* = 261. Unstandardized beta (*B*) coefficients are reported with robust standard errors (*SE*). Bootstrap sample = 10,000. Abbreviations: CI, confidence interval; LL, lower limit; UP, upper limit. \**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

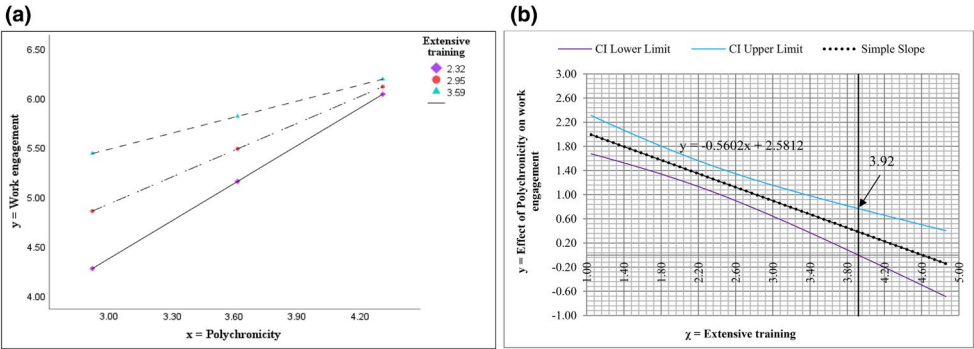
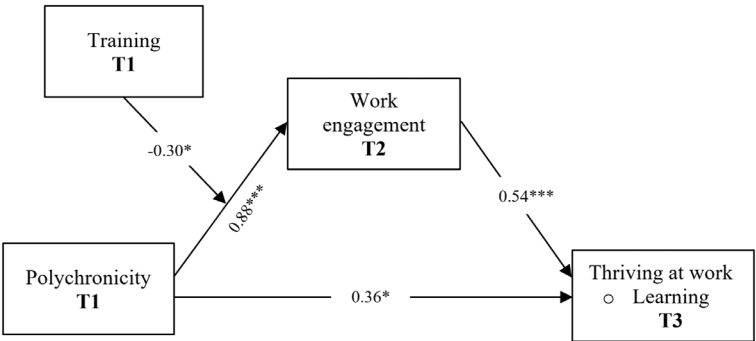


FIGURE 2 (a) Moderating effect of training. Values of training are −1 SD, mean, and +1 SD. (b) Johnson Neyman plot of interaction effect (JN ≤3.92).



**FIGURE 3** Results of hypotheses testing. Mediation path: Polychronicity → Work engagement → Learning = .40\*. T1 = time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

and hybrid work arrangements and the technological breakthrough which influences employee's *preference* for engaging in several tasks simultaneously (Sanderson et al., 2013; Yeo et al., 2024). Polychronic frontline employees can easily utilize their personal resources to improve themselves at work (Porath et al., 2012). Therefore, the fit between polychronicity and thriving indicates that our finding underscores the significance of the eclectic and fast-paced hotel environment for frontline employees to excel in their polychronic tendencies. Yet, extant research to date has predominantly focused on more general individual characteristics (e.g. psychological capital, core self-evaluation and proactive personality) as antecedents of thriving at work (Goh et al., 2022; Kleine et al., 2019), neglecting the relevance of polychronicity. Polychronicity is distinct from proactive personality because proactive employees favour sequential tasks over juggling multiple tasks simultaneously. Additionally, while polychronic employees are adaptable in the workplace, polychronicity emphasizes the *preferences* for managing multiple tasks, whereas adaptability is about flexibility and responsiveness to changes in the work conditions (Howard & Cogswell, 2023). However, as a trait associated with the *preference* for multitasking capabilities (Slocombe & Bluedorn, 1999), polychronicity has become a pivotal focus within the dynamic context of the hospitality industry. Hence, guided by the socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005), which highlights the relevance of individual characteristics in fostering thriving experiences our findings suggest that polychronicity can sustain employee thriving at work. In this regard, we extend the conversation on individual characteristics through polychronicity and their significant roles in sustaining thriving for frontline hotel employees (Chang & Busser, 2020; Kim et al., 2023).

Second, we contribute to the growing literature on polychronicity and thriving by testing the underlying mechanism that explains why polychronicity enhances employee workplace thriving. We draw from the socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005) to identify work engagement as an essential mediating mechanism accounting for this relationship. Specifically, our findings suggest that polychronicity enhances employee work engagement, which then provides ongoing access to goal-directed activities (Bakker et al., 2008; Bledow et al., 2011) and promotes thriving at work (Walumbwa et al., 2018). As such, our research adds depth to our understanding of how polychronicity influences thriving at work experiences. This contribution addresses an important gap in the emerging literature on the individual characteristics (i.e. polychronicity) domain of social embedded networks by providing a richer understanding of the mechanism through which polychronicity impacts thriving (Asghar et al., 2020; Karatepe et al., 2013). In addition, we resolve the tension surrounding the positionality of engagement in thriving research by arguing for work engagement as a gauge bridging individual characteristics and thriving (Kleine et al., 2019; Wallace et al., 2016). Consequently, we challenge the conceptual accuracy of Goh et al.'s (2022) integrative review and the theoretic basis of Rabiul et al.'s (2023) empirical research that conceptualizes work engagement as a proximal attitudinal outcome of thriving at work.

Third, we contribute to the literature by demonstrating that polychronic employees who partake in training are less likely to be engaged at work, thus making them less likely to thrive at work

(Beltran-Martin et al., 2017; Howard & Cogswell, 2023). While training is generally recognized as a key human resource practice that allows knowledge transfer and skill development (Blume et al., 2019; Garavan, McCarthy, Lai, Murphy, et al., 2021), our research findings uncover the unintended (negative) consequence of training. Considering the findings that training counterintuitively hinders the potential linkages between polychronicity, work engagement, and, ultimately, employee thriving (Conte & Gintoft, 2005; Slocombe & Bluedorn, 1999), our study provides a nuanced understanding of the potential adverse effect of training on employees with polychronic tendencies. This finding challenges prior research on the beneficial effects of training as a boundary condition, which posits that skill training enhances the capabilities of employees, boosts their self-confidence to exercise greater work control and makes them proactive at performing their assigned work roles (Ehrnrooth et al., 2021; Kostopoulos et al., 2015; Suseno et al., 2022). We contend that focusing on one side of the training tension as if in isolation hinders our ability to deploy and manage our employees as unique resources to confer competitive advantage (Boselie et al., 2005; Delery & Doty, 1996). Therefore, the present research findings underscore the importance of considering the potential downside of training initiatives, especially for individuals with specific work traits (e.g. polychronicity), in sustaining their thriving at work. We encourage more research to shed new light on *how* and *when* training demands may unintentionally hinder positive workplace outcomes.

## Practical implications

Our research findings hold significant practical implications for organizations, and specifically for frontline hotel employees and their managers. First, it suggests the need for managers to recognize the value of frontline employees' polychronic tendencies. We believe that acknowledging and leveraging these tendencies can foster a more vibrant and adaptive work environment that enables employees to thrive at work. An important step in this regard could be establishing training programmes and work structures that accommodate these proclivities, which may enhance their work engagement and overall thriving, as suggested by our findings.

Second, our research highlights that managers should focus on strategies that enhance work engagement among frontline employees. For example, in instances where a manager notices that an employee with multitasking preferences is not engaged at work, it is important to ask questions and provide the necessary support to such employees. This could include helping them avoid burnout (Bakker et al., 2014), providing autonomy in task scheduling or designing job roles that allow for flexibility (Bakker et al., 2023; Lesener et al., 2020), enabling individuals to align their work with their natural polychronic orientation, and ultimately fostering an environment that is conducive to thriving at work.

Third, while training programmes are essential for skill development (Garavan, McCarthy, Lai, Murphy, et al., 2021), an excessive focus on extensive skill training may inadvertently hinder the positive effects of polychronicity on work engagement and thriving. Consequently, organizations should reevaluate their training approaches to ensure they do not inadvertently undermine employees' natural tendencies and energy at work. One way to do this could be for organizations to strike a balance between providing necessary training and recognizing individual differences in work approaches. Customizing training programmes that align with individual preferences or providing alternative learning pathways could help mitigate the unintended negative effect of skill training on hotel employees' thriving at work.

## Limitations and directions for future research

Although the socially embedded model of thriving highlights agentic behaviours as the engine of thriving, restrictions of data accessibility constrained us from including agentic behaviours (i.e. task focus, exploration and heedful relating; Goh et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2023; Spreitzer et al., 2005) in

our theoretical model. Despite this theoretical omission, we are confident that our application of the socially embedded model of thriving coupled with our unique research design provides strong support for our empirical findings. However, we encourage future research to improve upon our model by examining other agentic behaviours, such as the explorative and exploitative facets of ambidexterity at the employee level. We believe that examining employee ambidexterity (Lee et al., 2022; Tuan, 2022) will have incremental validity far above and beyond the exploration that Spreitzer and colleagues (Spreitzer et al., 2005, 2012; Spreitzer & Porath, 2014) outlined in their theorization as an agentic behaviour that helps to sustain workplace thriving.

Second, we focused on workplace thriving as the germane outcome of polychronicity despite recent meta-analyses and reviews on thriving at work highlighting several important outcomes, including attitudinal (e.g. job satisfaction and affective commitment), well-being (e.g. subjective health and burnout) as well as in-role and extra-role behaviours (e.g. creative performance and OCB) (Goh et al., 2022; Kleine et al., 2019; Porath et al., 2022). We encourage future research to extend our model by incorporating the attitudinal and well-being outcomes highlighted above to explain the thriving implications of polychronicity.

Third, while the socially embedded model of thriving is inherently multilevel in nature (Goh et al., 2022; Spreitzer et al., 2005), our research design measured thriving at work at the individual level. Hence, we acknowledge that our research design shelves the inherent multilevel nuances in the socially embedded model of thriving. To advance our theoretical model, we encourage future research to adopt a multi-source and multilevel approach (see Jiang et al., 2024; Walumbwa et al., 2018) by capturing thriving at work as a multiple construct (Chen et al., 2004; Goh et al., 2022), precisely as at the second level from supervisors or coworkers and the independent variables at level one from the focal employees, as well as employing longitudinal research design to address issues of common method bias and causality.

Fourth, our study did not control for work design characteristics that may have confounded the polychronicity and thriving relationship and thus impact its generalizability (Carter et al., 2024; Grant et al., 2010). Yet, we concede that the changing nature of flexible, remote and hybrid work arrangements, including virtual teams and telework, can impact the work design features (e.g. time pressure, deadlines and task switching) in the context of our study, which is conducive to individuals with polychronic proclivities (Sanderson et al., 2013; Slocombe & Bluedorn, 1999). For instance, when employees are given the option to engage in job crafting and design their own work arrangements, they will customize their work in a manner that does not favour polychronic behaviours (Holman et al., 2024; Parker et al., 2001). Therefore, we ask future research to acknowledge the temporary, flexible and remote work design arrangements as covariates to enhance our understanding of the true nature of the polychronicity—thriving relationship in the context of the hospitality and tourism industry.

Fifth, our focus on only four-star frontline hotel employees in a single country—Ghana—could limit the extrapolation and generalizability of our findings to non-star hotels and other restaurant businesses in Ghana and other sub-regions in the African continent. As such, there is the need for a comprehensive study that utilizes a larger sample of hotel employees to help generalize our findings. Additionally, previous research has speculated that cultural and sector-specific factors can shape how employees perceive and experience training and feel engaged at work (Farndale & Sanders, 2017; Fletcher et al., 2020). We suggest that future research investigate our research model in other hospitality and tourism organizations in- and outside of our study context to provide a fresh insight and a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between our study constructs (i.e. polychronicity, engagement, detrimental facet of training and learning facet of thriving at work).

## CONCLUSION

Despite the proliferation of thriving research, we know little about the enabling role of polychronicity and the process mechanisms that prompt frontline hotel employees to thrive at work. Guided by the socially embedded model of thriving, our study underscores the positive effect of polychronicity and

work engagement in fostering frontline employees thriving. Also, we uncover how the unintended consequence of training counteracts the positive direct and attenuates the indirect (via work engagement) effect of polychronicity on thriving at work (i.e. learning). The unintended (negative) moderating effect of training shines light on the potential dark side of contextual factors, including human resource management practices and thus calls for hotel managers to adopt the appropriate training initiatives to support their frontline employees' polychronic proclivities.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**Michael Asiedu Gyensare:** Conceptualization; writing – original draft; investigation; methodology; writing – review and editing. **Gbemisola Soetan:** Conceptualization; investigation; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing. **Chidiebere Ogbonnaya:** Writing – review and editing; methodology; conceptualization; writing – original draft. **Joan-Ark Agyapong:** Conceptualization; writing – review and editing. **Hamid Roodbari:** Conceptualization; writing – review and editing.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

## ORCID

Michael Asiedu Gyensare  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7150-3594>

Chidiebere Ogbonnaya  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0704-5717>

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APPENDIX A

TABLE A1 Summary of key empirical studies between 2019 and 2023 on thriving at work in the hospitality and tourism literature.

No.	Authors (year)	Theoretical underpinnings	Research design	Sample and context	Predictor(s)	Mediator(s)	Moderator(s)	Consequence(s)
1	Wu and Chen (2019)	Social learning theory Conservation of resources theory	Three-wave survey	354 full-time Taiwan frontline employees from 86 hotel units	Authentic leadership	Collective mindfulness Collective thriving	n/a	Helping behaviour Proactive customer service behaviour
2	Chang and Busser (2020)	Socially embedded model of thriving Social cognitive career theory Signalling theory	Cross-sectional	300 US hospitality employees	Psychological contract fulfilment POS	Thriving	n/a	Career satisfaction Career turnover intention
3	Xu et al. (2020)	Work-family enrichment theory	Multilevel	121 employees and 31 supervisors	Taking charge	Thriving at work	Leader's role ambiguity	Work-to-family enrichment
4	Cain et al. (2021)	Social cognitive career theory	Cross-sectional	300 undergraduate hospitality students	Having a calling	Thriving	Living a calling	Academic satisfaction Life satisfaction
5	Cheng et al. (2021)	Conservation of resource theory Boundary theory	Three-waves Employee-supervisor dyad	316 employees and 48 supervisors from 5 hotels in China	Problems at home	Thriving at work	Home-work segmentation preferences	Proactive customer service performance
6	Han and Hwang (2021a, 2021b)	Job crafting theory	Cross-sectional Employee-supervisor dyad	235 employees and 60 supervisors	Protean career orientation	Job crafting – strength and interest Leisure crafting	Perceived overqualification	Thriving at work Self-development behaviour Personal life enrichment of work
7	Han and Hwang (2021a, 2021b)	Conservation of resources theory	Cross-sectional Employee-supervisor dyad	240 employees and 39 supervisors	Supervisor ostracism	Thriving at work	Career calling	OCB towards customers Career adaptability
8	Huo (2021)	Socially embedded model of thriving Job demands-resources (JD-R) theory	Two-wave survey	242 frontline employees	Career growth opportunities	Thriving at work	COVID-19 anxiety	Career commitment Career regret

TABLE A1 (Continued)

No.	Authors (year)	Theoretical underpinnings	Research design	Sample and context	Predictor(s)	Mediator(s)	Moderator(s)	Consequence(s)
9	Lin et al. (2022)	Atheoretical	Sequential mixed methods (Multilevel and interview) approach	675 employees and 92 department managers in 28 hotels in China Interview of 15 middle managers from 11 hotels	Manager role overload Manager role ambiguity	Empowering leadership Employee role overload Employee role ambiguity	Manager trust in employees	Manager job thriving Employee job thriving
10	Nguyen and McGuirk (2022)	Social exchange theory (SET)	Cross-sectional	612 employees across 100 Vietnamese SMEs	Job demand Job control Supervisor support Coworker support	Thriving at work Organizational commitment	n/a	Employee innovative behaviour
11	Kim et al. (2023)	Broaden-and-build theory Social exchange theory Conservation of resources theory Job demands-resources (JD-R) theory	Cross-sectional	361 full-time US frontline hotel employees	Leader-member exchange Coworker support Customer-employee exchange	Headful relating	Perceived COVID-19 impact	Thriving at work
12	Rabul et al. (2023)	Transformational leadership Self-concept Servant leadership Socially embedded model of thriving	Cross-sectional	294 Cambodian frontline employees from five- and four-star hotels	Servant leadership Transformational leadership	Psychological safety Thriving at work	n/a	Work engagement
13	Wu et al. (2023)	Self-determination theory Social exchange theory	Two-wave survey	374 hotel employees from 92 departments in Taiwan	Leader-member exchange Coworker support	Thriving at work Change-oriented OCB	n/a	Service innovation performance
14	Chang et al. (2024)	Resource-based theory Self-determination theory Social exchange theory	Cross-sectional survey	657 hotel employees from 5* hotels in Taiwan	Thriving at work	n/a	LMX	Service performance