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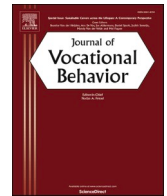
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Employee flourishing and moral obligation in extreme conditions

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ABSTRACT

We extend the extant call for a flourishing perspective by examining dynamic processes involving moral obligations of organizations, work meaningfulness, organizational responsiveness, and enabling conditions and their effects on employee flourishing in four studies from an emerging economy. Through a mixed-study design, we qualitatively explore (Study 1: $N = 146$), perceptions of employees about the moral obligations, enabling conditions, and responsiveness of their organizations during an extreme condition. We then conduct (in Study 2) an experiment with employees ($N = 63$) from the Kumasi metropolis in Ghana. The results of a 2 (high and low moral obligation) \times 2 (facilitative and inhibitive enabling conditions) between-subjects design show that employees in high moral obligation organizations with facilitative enabling conditions reported perceptions of better flourishing than those in the other conditions. In Study 3, cross-sectional ($N = 112$), we examine the mechanism and dynamics by which moral obligation influences employee flourishing. Study 4, a replication ($N = 81$), shows a pattern similar to that of Study 2 in the Accra metropolis in Ghana. Consistent with the human flourishing theory, we discuss implications for future research.

1. Introduction

Driven by concerns about the future of humanity, organizations are facing increased pressure to invest more toward improving the well-being of their employees and societies (Polman & Winston, 2022; Cooperrider, 2014). This has prompted calls for a sharper focus on an equitable future for all persons (Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013; Laszlo et al., 2014; Polman & Winston, 2021), particularly in times of uncertainty. Research shows that situational (organizational support, workplace resources, leadership, work-related stress, and broader societal influences – Schotanus-Dijkstra et al., 2016) and individual (extraversion, core self-evaluations, emotional stability, optimism, resilience, and positive emotions – Hsu et al., 2024) factors are determinants of employee flourishing (Diener et al., 2010). Moral obligation, defined as a sense of duty about engaging or not engaging in a particular behavior for its rightness (Ajzen, 1991; Vilas & Sabucedo, 2012), is also a causal factor (Bandura, 1986) that is linked to personal (entity) codes of conduct or a sense of autonomy (Higgins, 1989) during times of certainty in Western contexts (Seligman, 2011).

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Yet, it is unclear how organizations' moral obligations drive employee flourishing in a non-Western context in times of uncertainty. First, organizations' moral obligation may drive them to establish processes and systems that are significant for employees, making them develop a sense of belonging, positive work experiences, and fit with their role (i.e., work meaningfulness – Bailey et al., 2019), which, in turn, positively affects employee flourishing, as indicated by thriving and dignity. This mediated relationship is likely to vary at different levels of responsiveness to extreme conditions—rare environmental situations such as COVID-19, a global pandemic (Vaziri et al., 2020), political instability, and institutional fragility—such that some organizations may respond affirmatively (Cho, 2020; Probst et al., 2020), and others may refuse to do so (Bierwiazzonek et al., 2020; Trougakos et al., 2020). Further, the moderation of organizational responsiveness may depend on conditions (facilitative versus inhibitive) that enable organizations to respond affirmatively. Organizations' influence on employee flourishing may manifest in complex dynamics (Bowie, 2019).

We therefore examine *how* organizational and situational factors influence employee flourishing during uncertain times (i.e., extreme conditions) in the African context. During extreme conditions (Bierwiazzonek et al., 2020; Cho, 2020; Trougakos et al., 2020), the dynamics of moral conditions influencing flourishing are likely to be different not only for individuals but also for organizations. Some organizations may “make a fundamental mindset shift from a focus on surviving to the pursuit of thriving” (Shah et al., 2021, p. 4) and take measures to alter risky situations arising from extreme conditions (e.g., pandemic; Bierwiazzonek et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2022) so as to minimize the effect on employees (Probst et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2021). Others, however, may take measures that heighten the risks faced by employees (Trougakos et al., 2020) by insisting on ‘work as usual’ (Bierwiazzonek et al., 2020; Probst et al., 2020), even though extreme conditions create anxiety that impairs ‘critical work (goal progress), home (family engagement), and health (somatic complaints) outcomes due to increased emotion suppression and lack of psychological need fulfillment’ (Trougakos et al., 2020, p. 1234).

Leveraging positive organizational scholarship, we extend human flourishing theory by reporting four studies that represent a mixed-study design. In Study 1 (qualitative), we examine the central phenomenon in terms of key constructs in the African context, understanding organizations' experiences, and highlighting the nature of the possible relationships between moral obligation and employee flourishing. In Study 2 (experiment), we explore the dynamics between organizations' moral obligation and employee flourishing. In Study 3 (cross-sectional), we further explore the mechanisms and dynamics underlying the relationship between moral obligation and employee flourishing. Study 4, a replication study, shows a pattern similar to that of Study 2 in a different city in Ghana. In doing so, we make three contributions. First, the complex dynamics we explore are unique to the spatial (Africa) and situational (extreme conditions) contexts. This demonstrates the complex dynamics of moral obligation that prompt organizations to respond in ways that facilitate employee flourishing (Bowie, 2019), which has implications for vocational outcomes such as retention, functioning, and career sustainability. Second, we identify dignity as an expanded indicator of employee flourishing (Porath et al., 2012; Spreitzer & Porath, 2012; Spreitzer & Sutcliffe, 2007). The inclusion of dignity improves our understanding of the nomological network of employee flourishing (Seligman, 2003). Third, the African geographic context of our study (Johns, 2012) offers a unique but complementary understanding of the subject matter. African organizations “portray unique African features relating to ownership, management, and locus, exhibiting different contextual embeddedness and purpose” than foreign organizations (Zoogah et al., 2023a, p. 413). Consistent with the view that emerging contexts (e.g., Africa) can be a laboratory to test the validity of Western theories (Barnard et al., 2017), we show that the linear predictions of employee flourishing defined by thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005; Spreitzer et al., 2012) seem different (i.e., a function of multiple factors that sometimes join linearly) in the emerging context of Ghana.

2. Theory

Our research draws from human flourishing theory, which emphasizes the holistic development and well-being of individuals. Flourishing theory provides a broader psychological and ethical framework that encompasses but also transcends satisfaction. The theory highlights the significance of positive emotions, engagement, meaningful relationships, purpose, and personal achievements in fostering a fulfilling and thriving life (Seligman, 2011; Symons & VanderWeele, 2024; VanderWeele, 2017). Even though the extant orientation toward positivity in organizations is contentious (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Fineman, 2006; Gable & Haidt, 2005; Roberts, 2006), there is an emerging consensus that positive psychology, ‘the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions’ (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 104), is good for organizations. Positive organizational scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003) leverages this idea to argue for harnessing human strengths, virtues, and vitality for the cultivation of extraordinary states and experiences of flourishing in organizations (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011; Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003).

Nominally, flourishing is defined as ‘growing or developing in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as the result of a particularly congenial environment’ (Oxford Dictionary, via Google). As a concept, it emerged from the Aristotelian view of human excellence. It emphasizes living well, human goodness, and happiness (eudaimonia) across human domains (Waterman, 1990, 1993). Although the concept has recently been a focus of management and organization science, flourishing has been extensively examined at the individual level in positive psychology (Crespo & Mesurado, 2015; Seligman, 2011). Our focus is at the organizational level, where it has been defined as ‘the pattern of conditions and organizational processes that facilitate optimal functioning associated with the realization of potential, thriving, and generativity even in challenging circumstances, while embedded in a socioeconomic and environmental context’ (Zoogah et al., 2023a, p. 413). This view of organizational flourishing not only fits with the multidimensional view of well-being (Diener et al., 2010; Rothmann, 2013; Seligman, 2011), but suggests that organizational members' (i.e., employees) flourishing reflects that of the organization. When employees of the organization have a purposeful and meaningful work life; are engaged, interested, and competent in their work; feel dignified; have supportive relationships; and socially contribute to the happiness of peers (Diener et al., 2010), it defines the organization. In that regard, organizational flourishing is indicated by employee

flourishing.

Employee flourishing in this study is indicated by two factors: thriving and dignity. Thriving refers to ‘a desirable subjective experience (Warr, 1990) helping individuals to understand what and how they are doing, and whether it is increasing their individual functioning and adaptability at work’ (Spreitzer & Porath, 2014, p. 247). Dignity focuses on respect, valuation of one’s worth, fair treatment, and decision-making. Within organizations, it refers to employees’ evaluation of their worth as recognized by the organization (Allan & Blustein, 2022; Hodson, 2001; Pirson, 2017). Both thriving and dignity nurture feelings of personal growth, build healthy work organizations (Spreitzer & Hwang, 2019), and sustain performance (Bal, 2017; Spreitzer & Porath, 2012). They therefore heighten employee flourishing (Seligman, 2011), an indicator of organizational flourishing.

Studies of organizational flourishing have mostly been in the Western context (Seligman, 2003), where strong institutions and systems facilitate normal, certain, and ordered conditions (Laszlo et al., 2014). In their study of employee flourishing at the workplace, Colbert et al. (2016), p. 1199 found that “work relationships play a key role in promoting employee flourishing” and “the differential effects of a taxonomy of relationship functions bring precision to our understanding of how relationships impact individual flourishing”. In another study, Redelinguys et al. (2019), p. 609 reported that “workplace flourishing negatively predicted intention to leave, while positively predicting in-role performance and organizational citizenship behavior”, suggesting that employees who experienced flourishing were less likely to quit their organizations. Less known is how organizational flourishing functions in contexts characterized by extreme conditions due to institutional fragility. Given that context enhances or constrains the behaviors and outcomes of individuals, groups, and organizations (Johns, 2006, 2018), it is likely the effects of employee flourishing will be exacerbated in the African context in extreme conditions (Zoogah et al., 2015).

We argue that organizational flourishing is likely to be dynamically impacted. One reason is that the context of the study has been shown conceptually (see Zoogah et al., 2015) and empirically (see Zoogah et al., 2023b; Zoogah & Swanzy-Krah, 2024) to exhibit dynamic features. Not only is the institutional environment syncretic as a result of historical influences (Nkomo et al., 2015), but also the historical and cultural contexts show dynamism due to foreign influences (Armah, 2018). Consequently, the effect of moral obligation on organizational flourishing is likely to be dependent on other factors.

A model summarizing all the relationships examined and reported here is shown in Fig. 1. First, we propose that moral obligation influences organizational flourishing in extreme conditions (Study 2) through work meaningfulness (Study 3). It is premised on an expanded notion of organizations—not just individuals—as moral actors, a view in line with Bowie (2019) and Backer (2008). Organizations have to design systems and processes that are significant for employees to execute in a way that affects their well-being positively, a view consistent with Hackman and Oldham (1980). Whether or not work meaningfulness manifests depends on the responsiveness of the organization (Study 1 and 3). Organizations with high responsiveness are likely to design systems with greater meaningfulness in contrast to those with low responsiveness. Consequently, organizational responsiveness is proposed to moderate the mediated relationship. In addition, we contend that whether or not an organization is responsive depends on the conditions that enable responsiveness. Enabling conditions therefore moderate the mediated moderation of organizational responsiveness and work meaningfulness (i.e., a three-way interaction) such that when conditions are facilitative, employee flourishing is likely to be higher than when the conditions are inhibitive. The replication (Study 4) includes all the factors.

3. Context of studies

The context of the studies reported here was Ghana, an economy in Africa. There is increasing economic vibrancy but a dearth of studies on the dynamics of moral obligation and work meaningfulness on employee flourishing in that context. The African context is generally characterized by relational humanism derived from MAAT philosophy (Hord & Lee, 2016; Karenga, 2015), which is associated with Kemet (sometimes framed as KMT), the people of the Nile Valley. The descendants of modern Africa are from Kemet (Obenga, 1990). Ghanaians trace their roots to the ancient kingdoms of Mali, Songhay, and Ghana, which in turn trace theirs to Nubia and

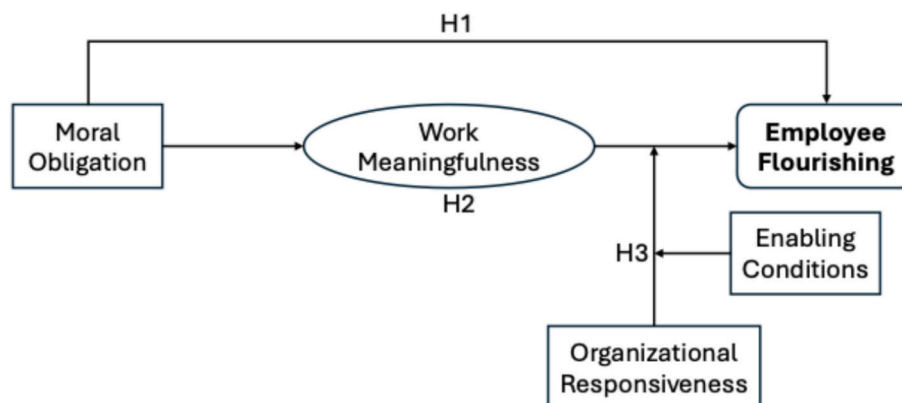


Fig. 1. (Studies 2–4)
Model of Driver and Dynamics of Employee Flourishing.

onward to Kemet or ancient Egypt (Armah, 2018). As generations of Black Africans spread across the continent, they brought along some of their philosophies, practices, values, and morals (Armah, 2018). Consequently, some of the moral ideals stipulated by MAAT are still observed in modern Africa, albeit in a modified form due to the destructive influence of colonialism (see Zoogah, 2021, for details). According to MAAT, individuals and groups are expected to facilitate each other's thriving (Armah, 2018). They are also enjoined to be responsive or heedful (i.e., sedjemic) to each other (Zoogah, 2021).

4. Study 1: Organizational responsiveness in extreme conditions (qualitative)

4.1. Purpose, participants and procedure

Consistent with Saldaña (2009), we conducted a qualitative study to enable us determine the perceptions of employees about their organizations' response to extreme conditions and to help us develop dimensions of conditions, responsiveness of organizations, and outcomes associated with extreme conditions. In terms of participants, the extreme condition, COVID19 precluded physical contact. As a result, participants were selected via professional and academic networks. Regarding the procedure, we presented an interview protocol (9 questions) to the selected participants, workers ($N = 146$), to complete via an online platform. The responses were

Table 1

Aggregate factors and example interview quotations.

Factor	Example Quotations
Moral Obligation of Organizations	<p>"I think my company was obliged from the way they handle the situation, trying to support teachers while at home and working from home." (Respondent #10).</p> <p>"They (referring to organization) were morally obliged because the industry that we were in was badly hit and lives were being lost, so if no action is taking as early as possible, it will go a long way to affect us" (Respondent #11).</p> <p>"They were not obliged because it was a national pandemic" (Respondent #12).</p>
Responsiveness	<p>"At the workshop the organization gave training on hand washing, the proper use of nose mask, social distancing rules, checking of body temperature before classes, the use of sanitizer and many more." (Respondent #6).</p> <p>"My organization responded swiftly toward the pandemic by organizing a workshop on the pandemic's protocols" (Respondent #1).</p> <p>"In response to the pandemic the organization (actual name deleted) initiated the key strategic interventions in its operations. The response was with the objectives of keeping staff and stakeholders protected from the disease, implementing the available work plan to achieve targets within deadlines and cost." (Respondent #5).</p>
Enabling Conditions	<p>"There was proactive periodic testing" (Respondent #21)</p> <p>"My organization adopted new policies that made it safe" (Respondent #2).</p>
Thriving	<p>"Some of the staff had to work even during the lockdown" (Respondent #3).</p> <p>"My capacity to combine maintaining a family while also learning new work procedures and adapting to a new way of life brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic (extreme condition) has proven to me that I am superhuman." (Respondent #12)</p> <p>"The COVID-19 pandemic (extreme condition) has impacted me and the blooming of the employees at Assemblies of God Greater Accra East Office. However, even though the pandemic is not over and many companies are still finding ways to adapt, many workers, in myriad of ways, are bearing brunt of the pandemic but still adapting to the new way of life." (Respondent #3)</p> <p>"This pandemic has presented an opportunity to our organizational leaders where they took bold actions and showed solidarity with we, the employees, to better balance the short-term crisis against long-term objectives of responsible employers." (Respondent #24)</p>
Dignity	<p>"The approach the organization took has helped us the employees to unlock the discretionary effort needed to move the organization forward in turbulent times." (Respondent #29)</p> <p>"I believe I have grown to love myself more, which has strengthened my confidence in my abilities and myself. I mention this because I was astounded at how quickly I was able to adjust to the new system. I was able to gain new talents and improve myself by working and also appreciated doing everything online." (Respondent #5)</p> <p>"The presence of the company was felt and everyone around me as a friend as well as clients appreciated the efforts the company took in supporting the government as a stakeholder. As the company addresses the longer-term implications of Covid-19 (extreme condition), it appreciated our efforts and also considered it worthy to focus on the needs of all its stakeholders to ensure no one is left behind." (Respondent #17)</p> <p>"My company's response to the Covid-19 pandemic made me feel like a treasured member of the team and has positively impacted me. For example, in contrast to some companies, employees in our company that had been exposed got tested on the company's account meaning our health and safety are top priority to management. Additionally, working from home has also greatly improved confidence among employees with respect to their abilities and reduced the tendencies of micromanagement by line managers. The fact that my boss can request something on days that I'm working from home and I don't feel the need to rush into the office pleases me a lot." (Respondent #31)</p>

submitted in writing given the extreme condition. The participants were from four major cities in Ghana—Accra, Kumasi, Ho, and Takoradi—and asked them to describe their organizations' responses to the extreme condition and how it affected employee thriving. The interview questions were designed to gain an understanding of the participants narrating their lived experiences of how their organizations responded to extreme conditions, "with the interviewer prompting for more information after particularly important or incomplete responses" (Schabram & Maitlis, 2017, p. 589).

4.2. Analysis

We analyzed the interview data using diverse coding techniques (first cycle and second cycle; recommended by Saldaña, 2009) that included pattern, axial, emotion, and thematic coding supplemented by computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQ-DAS) such as NVivo and WordStat 8 to elicit a comprehensive picture of the data. Moreover, the computer-assisted analysis program helped in flexibly coding and organizing the data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) and ensured a systematic analysis that improved the trustworthiness of the research (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). Three trained graduate students conducted first cycle coding based on content attributes (Saldaña, 2009). We observed more content attributes of facilitative enabling conditions ($n = 704$) than inhibitive enabling conditions ($n = 647$). The result was 2571 words, which were put into three categories consistent with the conceptual model: organizational policies, extreme conditions, and personal protection. Inter-coder ($n = 3$) reliability (Krippendorff's alpha) for the categories ranged from 25 % to 30 % initially and resolved via consensus meeting to 71 %. In line with Charmaz (2006, p. 60), axial coding ('relating categories to subcategories [and specifying] the properties and dimensions of a category') was then conducted and along with emotion coding (affective orientations of respondents to their organizations; Goleman, 1995) of the respondents. An analysis of differences in positive and negative sentiments generated by the qualitative software, Wordstat v.8, showed significant differences in the sentiments ($F[1,20] = 29.99, p < 0.0001$). We then conducted thematic coding (phrases about using the data and what they mean; Saldaña, 2009), identified moral obligation, responsiveness, and enabling conditions in addition to outcomes (thriving, anxiety, welfare, safety).

4.3. Findings

In this study we were interested in employees' perception of their organizations' moral obligation to ensure their flourishing during extreme conditions. Consistent with qualitative research method, we use a table to summarize and present the findings as suggested by Eisenhardt (1989) while elaborating further in the text. Table 1 presents the factors (aggregate dimensions) together with example interview quotes that best illustrate the points made (Pratt, 2009).

We observed varied responses of employees about the moral obligation of their organizations. While some perceived their organizations to be morally obliged others did not think so given that the extreme condition was a force majeure. Organizations that were perceived to be morally obliged were induced to provide education on the potential harm of the extreme condition, and to counsel employees on protective measures to ensure their wellbeing. Organizations that were perceived to be morally obliged were likely to respond quickly to extreme conditions that may negatively affect their employees (see Table 1). Research shows that organizational responsiveness is associated with positive outcomes not only for employees but also organizations (Bernardes & Hanna, 2009; Ingram & Simons, 1995). In this study, some organizations were very responsive. Respondents point out that the responsiveness was to facilitate thriving as the organization provided welfare-centered education. While some respondents acknowledged and appreciated (i. e., positive attributes) their organizations' responsiveness, others did not appreciate (i.e., negative attributes). In other words, the responsiveness of the organizations was enabled by conditions of facilitative or inhibitive conditions. Enabling conditions refer to conditions that either facilitate or constrain response to the extreme condition encountered. As shown in Table 1, facilitative conditions differed from inhibitive ones. Lastly, the respondents observed flourishing outcomes (e.g., thriving and dignity). The positive and negative sides of moral obligation, responsiveness, and enabling conditions suggest probable varied effects on employee flourishing.

5. Study 2: An experiment

5.1. Moral obligation of organizations and employee flourishing

The findings from Study 1 suggests that employees perceived their organizations to be morally obligated to respond to the extreme condition because of their wellbeing. To examine the degree to which moral obligation of organizations relates to employee flourishing, we conducted an experiment (Study 2).

Situations like pandemics challenge organizations and morally obligate them to respond in a way that facilitates employee flourishing. Moral obligation, an entity's sense of duty about engaging or not in a particular behavior for its rightness (Ajzen, 1991), or 'a motivational force toward a certain action that later could end in a decision to execute a behavior' (Sabucedo et al., 2018, p. 2), derives from Kant's work on the categorical imperative, an objective principle that must always be followed no matter the consequences (Johnson & Cureton, 2017). Bandura (1986) suggested that people sometimes behave based on their morals despite the elevated costs that these actions could incur.

Studies of moral obligation at the individual level (Ajzen, 1991; Vilas & Sabucedo, 2012) have identified dimensions that include a sense of obligation to a cause (Bandura, 1986), linkage to personal (entity) codes of conduct or a sense of autonomy (Higgins, 1989), personal satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1995), discomfort (Higgins, 1987), and sacrifice (Zimbardo, 2007). Studies have also shown that moral obligation manifests in situations of inclination (i.e., the tendency to do something; Beck & Ajzen, 1991) and declination (i.

e., the tendency not to do something; Reiner, 2012; Whitley, 1998). This view fits with findings that individuals are unlikely to engage in a particular behavior even if it yields negative outcomes for others (Beck & Ajzen, 1991).

An emerging view suggests that moral obligation applies to collectives, such as organizations (Bowie, 2019). Consequently, organizations may have the *inclination* to act or *declination* not to act out of moral obligation. It is therefore unfortunate that empirical studies at the organizational level are lacking. During times of uncertainty, such as extreme conditions, an organization has 'obligations to all other individuals with which it engages in transactions or interactions' (Backer, 2008, p. 607). The organization's value systems governing moral conduct is a strong force that drives it to engage in morally obligatory behaviors (Sabucedo et al., 2018; Vilas & Sabucedo, 2012). This endogenous source is supplemented by exogenous sources, such as when organizations are expected to engage in corporate social responsibility out of moral obligation (Backer, 2008). Organizations may therefore be inclined to act out of moral obligation to ensure employees flourish during an extreme condition. They may also be inclined to behave morally to generate positive outcomes for themselves or their constituents. As a result, they may set up systems, practices, and policies in ways that influence employee flourishing (cf. Backer, 2008; Bowie, 2019). In addition, they may have the declination to not put up barriers or constraints that impede employee flourishing. For example, unlike the meat packaging organizations in the United States that required employees to be at work, which worsened an extreme condition (e.g., further spreading of a pandemic), other companies declined to compel their employees to work, out of moral obligation (Wagner & Hayes, 2020).

As moral obligation increases, employee flourishing is likely to increase. The sense of obligation to promote employee welfare, as well as the sense of autonomy in preventing harm to employees, is likely to drive organizations to adopt policies, establish systems, and initiate processes that enable employees to thrive. The satisfaction that they are protecting and preserving their human assets is a strong motivation that impels organizations to ensure employee thriving (Hodson, 2001; Kostera & Pirson, 2017). Even though organizations might experience some discomfort when changing entrenched processes, the extant and future well-being of employees seems a greater force that may override that discomfort (Homburg et al., 2007). As a result, to facilitate employee flourishing, organizations may sacrifice resources that would not have been expended under normal circumstances (Bowie, 2019). For example, they might expend resources to reconfigure work systems consistent with recommended extreme condition practices (e.g., pandemic social distancing during work tasks, pandemic sanitizing of equipment). The purpose of that sacrifice is to improve employee flourishing. It is therefore likely that:

Hypothesis 1. *Perceived moral obligation relates positively to employee flourishing.*

5.2. Method

5.2.1. Purpose

The purpose of this experiment was to manipulate moral obligation and enabling conditions of organizations to examine employee ratings of thriving. As already argued, studies of moral obligation have primarily been idiographic, in which individuals express judgment about the duty to assist others in need (Singer, 1972; Unger, 1996), given situations that put pressure on them (Gorsuch & Ortberg, 1983; Hart, 1961) and based on their ability (Buckwalter & Turri, 2015). We contend that similar obligations are likely to apply to organizations, which may be perceived as having a duty to assist employees in need during trying times, based on their ability.

5.2.2. Design, materials, and procedure

We used a 2 (moral obligation–low vs. high) \times 2 (enabling conditions–facilitative vs. inhibitive) between-subjects design in which each participant was exposed to one of four conditions: (1) low moral obligation–inhibitive enabling condition, (2) low moral obligation–facilitative enabling condition, (3) high moral obligation–inhibitive enabling condition, and (4) high moral obligation–facilitative enabling condition. We expected employee flourishing to be rated higher in Condition 4 and lower in Condition 1.

Moral obligation (perceived duty to care for employees during extreme conditions, such as a pandemic) and enabling conditions (organizational culture and structure) were conceptualized the same as in Study 1. We then created a scenario where a fictitious organization, Organization B, has either high or low moral obligation and inhibitive or facilitative enabling conditions. Inhibitive conditions enable harm or negative outcomes, while facilitative conditions enable progress or positive outcomes. We then created a scenario where a fictitious organization, Organization B, has either high or low moral obligation and inhibitive or facilitative enabling conditions. Inhibitive conditions enable harm or negative outcomes while facilitative conditions enable progress or positive outcomes. In conditions 2 and 3 Organization B combined low moral obligation with facilitative enabling condition and high moral obligation and inhibitive enabling obligation respectively. Below are scenarios for conditions 4 and 1:

5.2.2.1. Condition 4. Organization B instructed its employees to not continue work as usual. Instead, they are to work from home during the pandemic because it has a high sense of duty not to increase the risk of employees spreading the disease. As a result of its cultural, leadership, and strategic orientation, the organization adhered to Ministry of Health guidelines, devised new policies, made infrastructural changes, and initiated health and safety protocols. All these were to minimize the risk of spread of the pandemic in the organization and general society.

5.2.2.2. Condition 1. Organization B instructed its employees not to continue work as usual. Instead, it instructed employees to work only two days in the office during the pandemic because it has a low sense of duty not to increase the risk of employees spreading the disease. However, due to its cultural, leadership, and strategic orientation, the organization neither adhered to Ministry of Health guidelines nor made changes in policies, infrastructure, and health and safety protocols which could have minimized the risk of spread

of the pandemic in the organization and general society.

To determine whether policy framing made a difference, we created another scenario under which a policy of ‘work two days in the office during the pandemic’ was replaced with ‘work three days from home during the pandemic.’ A pilot experiment using a different sample ($n = 25$) not only confirmed that ratings of thriving were highest in Condition 4 and lowest in Condition 1, but also that there was no difference in the criterion because of the framing. Further, results of the manipulation checks (see [Appendix 1](#)) — confidence in the scenarios, agreement on conditions, and response behavior of fictitious Organization B — yielded results consistent with our expectations.

Prior to exposing the participants to the treatment conditions, we piloted the scenarios along with two items on employee thriving, controls, and demographics of individuals in the pre- and post-treatment stages using a sample of 24 participants (six participants per condition). Based on feedback from the pilot, we revised the scenarios, variables, and controls. For example, instead of four organizations with different attributes, we presented one organization with the same attributes except for the factors and their levels. Before arriving at the venue for the experiment, participants completed an online survey that was emailed to them two weeks earlier. The survey contained items on *employee thriving*, *perceived dignity*, and demographics of respondents. We used Google forms to collect the responses, and 97 % of the surveys were completed and returned.

On the day of the experiment, participants arrived at the venue and were greeted by a researcher who was blind to the study. They were then randomly assigned to one of four groups and presented with the group’s assigned scenario. Participants in Groups 1, 2, 3, and 4 were given Conditions 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. To maintain neutrality, the conditions were not color coded and participants were not allowed to discuss them with each other. After reading the scenario, they responded to questions on moral obligation, enabling conditions (facilitative or inhibitive), responsiveness of the organization, and perceived flourishing. They were then given 15 min to complete the manipulation checks on their confidence in the scenarios, agreement on realism of the conditions, and the response behavior of Organization B. Once all respondents had finished, the questionnaires were collected into envelopes labeled for each group. A post-survey was emailed to the participants two weeks later comprising items identical to those in the pre-survey. It also collected organizational demographics along with individual demographics.

5.2.3. Participants

We recruited workers ($n = 120$) in an employee development program of a major university in a metropolis in Ghana. However, it dropped from 120 recruited participants to 63 analyzed due to a combination of factors: non-response, attrition at the post-survey stage, and restrictions on in-person attendance due to COVID-19 protocols. The proportion of operatives, supervisors, managers, executives, and unknown was 31.75 %, 36.51 %, 23.81 %, 4.76 %, and 3.17 %, respectively. Organizational tenure was distributed as follows: ≤ 5 years (57 %), 6–10 years (25.4 %), 11–20 years (12.7 %), and ≥ 21 years (4.76 %). Female participants made up 58.73 %, and male participants were 41.27 %. Except for one person who was younger than 25, 60.32 % were 25–35 years old, while 28.75 % were 36–45, and 9.52 % were 46–55. The participants were well-educated: 34.92 % had a bachelor’s degree, and 65.08 % had a postgraduate degree. The majority of participants were actively employed (93.65 %), while 2 % and 4.76 % were graduate interns and unemployed, respectively. Participants representing local companies comprised 88.89 % of attendees, with 11.11 % representing foreign companies in 21 industries, including education (23.81 %), public sector (12.70 %), banking (11.11 %), health (6.35 %), mining (7.94 %), and unknown (7.84 %). Other industries comprising 3.2 % representation were nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), oil and gas, and agriculture. Participants from very large companies constituted 3.33 % of attendees, while 53.33 %, 20.0 %, and 23.33 % were from large, medium, and small companies, respectively.

5.2.4. Manipulation checks

One-way ANOVA assessed the extent to which participants were confident (a two-item scale that was piloted [$\alpha = 0.88$] and validated in this experiment [$\alpha = 0.78$]) in the manipulation of moral obligation ($F[1, 61] = 0.06, p < 0.808$) and enabling conditions ($F[1, 61] = 13.98, p < 0.0004$); goodness of the organization based on its moral obligation ($F[1, 61] = 0.80, p < 0.3753$) and enabling conditions ($F[1, 61] = 50.78, p < 0.00001$); and the perceived moral obligation of the organization described in the scenario ($F[1, 61] = 3.31, p < 0.07$) under both facilitative conditions ($F[1, 61] = 37.39, p < 0.00001$) and inhibitive ($F[1, 61] = 0.47, p < 0.4946$). Perceptions of the response behavior of the organization described in the scenario resulted in Condition 4 having a higher mean ($M = 6.7, SD = 0.61$) than Condition 3 ($M = 6.3, SD = 0.89$), Condition 2 ($M = 4.1, SD = 1.66$), or Condition 1 ($M = 3.2, SD = 1.97$), which suggests that the manipulation worked.

5.3. Measures

The dependent variable, employee flourishing, was measured with two indicators—employee thriving and dignity. Research shows *employee thriving*, defined as the experience of vitality (positive feelings associated with energy and zest) and learning (the acquisition and application of new knowledge and skills; [Porath et al., 2012](#); [Spreitzer & Hwang, 2019](#)), is an indicator ([Babalola et al., 2022](#); [Kleine et al., 2019](#); [Lu et al., 2023](#)) of employee flourishing. In this study, we used [Silva and Caetano’s \(2013\)](#) eight-item measure (seven-point scale from 1, strongly disagree, to 7, strongly agree) of positive human functioning, which is equivalent to [Spreitzer et al.’s \(2005\)](#) vitality dimension. We used the average index ($\alpha = 0.78$) such that a high score on the scale meant the respondent was functioning well (i.e., thriving). A sample item is ‘The work I am doing makes me feel hopeful about the future.’

We measured *perceived dignity* with [Alge’s \(1999\)](#) four-item felt dignity measure on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with $\alpha = 0.72$. A sample item is ‘I am just as good as anybody else,’ which correlated modestly with a traditional measure of dignity ($r = 0.545, p < 0.0001$), suggesting they are different ([Cohen et al., 2003](#)). CFA results showed a two-factor loading

based on the [Satorra & Bentler \(1988\)](#) estimator ($\chi^2 = 43.4$; $df = 15$; RMSEA_SB = 0.112; AIC = 3290.9; BIC = 3378.4; CFI_SB = 0.91; TLI_SB = 0.82).

The independent variable, *moral obligation*, was measured with five items ($\alpha = 0.82$) asking respondents to rate the extent of their agreement with statements about the moral obligations of their organization using a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) adapted from [Diener et al., 2010](#). A sample item is 'My organization has a sense of obligation to employees.' Consistent with [Diener et al. \(2010\)](#) our factor analysis showed two dimensions: sense of obligation ($\alpha = 0.82$) and sacrifice ($\alpha = 0.81$), which correlated moderately ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$).

Enabling conditions include characteristics of the environment that facilitate action including resources required to attain specific behavior or outcome. We measured it with eight items which asked respondents to indicate the degree to which their organizations created conditions that facilitated or inhibited work during the extreme condition using a 9-point Likert scale $-3 =$ Inhibits greatly, $-2 =$ Inhibits moderately, $-1 =$ Inhibits less, $0 =$ Neither inhibits nor facilitates, $1 =$ Facilitates less, $2 =$ Facilitates moderately, $3 =$ Facilitates greatly). The eight items were specific to the extreme condition, and developed through pilot, validation, and cross-validation in three prior studies. A similar approach was adopted by [Bobitt et al. \(2020\)](#) in the study of contextual influences on cannabis use. In this study, correlations among the two factors ranged from moderate ($r = 0.486$, $p < 0.0001$) to high ($r = 0.845$, $p < 0.0001$) and the overall reliability (α) was 0.90.

We controlled for age, job tenure, organizational tenure, marital status, and position because research shows they can influence the relationship between moral obligation and employee flourishing.

5.4. Analytic technique

Even though the power analysis revealed a sample size of 88, the actual sample was reduced by 22 subjects because on the day of the treatment, enforcement of workshop requirements by authorities limited the number of participants permitted on-site. Using an elaborate theory approach ([Rosenbaum, 2017](#)), we first examined the differences in means followed by covariates that might influence the treatments—age, gender, and type of organization. These preliminary tests were followed by substantive results based on a final sample of 63 participants (mean age 25–35 years), due to participant attrition at the post-survey stage. They are summarized in [Table 2](#).

Table 2

(Study 2 and Study 4).

Ratings for conditions in terms of employee flourishing.

(A) Study 2					
Condition	Dignity Mean	SD	95 % CI		n
Inhibitive–low moral obligation	2.76	0.11	2.53	2.99	16
Inhibitive–high moral obligation	2.95	0.09	2.78	3.12	16
Facilitative–low moral obligation	2.64	0.20	2.23	3.04	16
Facilitative–high moral obligation	2.73	0.13	2.48	2.98	15
$F(3, 59) = 0.93$, $p = 0.434$					
Condition	Organization responsiveness Mean	SD	95 % CI		n
Inhibitive–low moral obligation	−0.15	0.26	−0.68	0.38	16
Inhibitive–high moral obligation	−0.03	0.19	−0.42	0.36	16
Facilitative–low moral obligation	1.20	0.14	0.93	1.48	16
Facilitative–high moral obligation	1.41	0.12	1.18	1.65	15
$F(3, 59) = 18.58$, $p = 0.00001$					
(B) Study 4					
Condition	Dignity Mean	SD	95 % CI		n
Inhibitive–low moral obligation	2.88	0.12	2.65	3.12	15
Inhibitive–high moral obligation	2.72	0.07	2.58	2.85	16
Facilitative–low moral obligation	2.82	0.13	2.57	3.08	18
Facilitative–high moral obligation	2.51	0.15	2.20	2.82	16
$F(3, 61) = 1.76$, $p = 0.164$					
Condition	Organization responsiveness Mean	SD	95 % CI		n
Inhibitive–low moral obligation	−0.53	0.14	−0.81	−0.24	16
Inhibitive–high moral obligation	0.19	0.23	−0.28	0.66	16
Facilitative–low moral obligation	1.17	0.14	0.89	1.46	16
Facilitative–high moral obligation	1.28	0.22	0.84	1.72	15
$F(3, 61) = 20.02$, $p = 0.00001$					

Note: SD = Standard deviation; CI = confidence interval, n = number.

5.5. Results

As shown in Table 2, the mean rating of employee flourishing (perceived dignity) was higher in the high moral obligation conditions (inhibitive: $M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.09$; 95 % CI = 2.78–3.12, $p < 0.05$; facilitative: $M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.13$; 95 % CI = 2.48–2.98, $p < 0.05$) than with low moral obligation (inhibitive: $M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.11$; 95 % CI = 2.53–2.99, $p < 0.05$; facilitative: $M = 2.64$, $SD = 0.20$; 95 % CI = 2.23–3.04, $p < 0.05$).

In addition, the box and whisker plot in Fig. 2 indicates that for employee thriving, there was more variability in the low moral obligation–inhibitive enabling condition than in the high moral obligation–facilitative enabling condition. However, the mean in the inhibitive–low moral condition ($M = 3.88$) was higher than with high moral obligation ($M = 3.43$). A t -test (mean comparison with a hypothesized mean of 2.5 given the effect size of 0.50) showed a significant result ($M = 3.10$, $SE = 0.16$, $SD = 1.32$, 95 % CI = 2.76–3.43, $t = 3.56$, $p < 0.0004$). However, a paired comparison mean test of Condition 1 and Condition 4 showed no significant difference (contrast = -0.11 , $SE = 0.48$, $t = -0.23$, $p < 0.82$, 95 % CI = -1.07 – 0.85).

Further, the regression results (see Table 3) showed a main effect of moral obligation, albeit a negative effect, on perceived thriving (M4: $coef. = -0.21$, $SE = 0.11$; $t = 2.01$, $p < 0.05$) but not dignity (M4: $coef. = -0.21$, $SE = 0.15$; $t = 1.37$, ns), suggesting that for every unit of change in perceived moral obligation, employee thriving reduced by about 21 units. Even though the relationship is significant the direction is not as expected. The hypothesis is therefore not supported. This is surprising because theoretically, it makes sense for moral obligation to be positively related with employee thriving. However, the empirical result may be due to negative suppression and/or the extreme context because, as shown in appendix 2, the correlation is positive.

The mean ratings of organizational responsiveness are higher in the high moral obligation conditions (facilitative: $M = 1.41$, $SD = 0.12$; 95 % CI = 1.18–1.65, $p < 0.05$; inhibitive: $M = -0.03$, $SD = 0.19$; 95 % CI = -0.42 – 0.36 , ns) than with low moral obligation (facilitative: $M = 1.20$, $SD = 0.14$; 95 % CI = 0.93–1.48, $p < 0.05$; inhibitive: $M = -0.15$, $SD = 0.26$; 95 % CI = -0.68 – 0.38 , ns). Fig. 4 shows that under facilitative conditions, moral obligation is higher, but under inhibitive conditions, low moral obligation is higher. That suggests an interaction. However, moderator analysis did not reveal a significant effect of a two-way or three-way interaction in this experiment (see Table 3). As noted above, it might be due to negative suppression. Nonetheless, there is evidence that moral obligation can foster flourishing under certain supportive conditions.

6. Study 3. Cross-sectional

The purpose of this cross-sectional study was two-fold. We examine the mechanism by which moral obligation influences employee flourishing and contingencies that differentiate the relationship.

6.1. Mediation of work meaningfulness

We had a dual purpose in this study. First, we were interested in examining the mediation of work meaningfulness, a *mechanism* by which the moral obligation of organizations influences employee thriving. The Deloitte Global Trends Report indicates that organizations need to ground themselves in a set of human principles, one of which is purpose and meaning, because such principles put the social enterprise in a position to thrive (Shah et al., 2021). Enactment of this principle requires organizations to establish practices and processes that make work meaningful to employees. Since Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics model proposed meaningful work as a psychological dimension, several studies have been conducted on the antecedents, processes, and outcomes of meaningful work (e.g., Allan et al., 2019). Meaningful work refers to the significance or value of work (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016), or “the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards” (May et al., 2004, p. 15). Given that individuals have a primary motive to seek meaning in their work (Frankl, 1992), lack of meaning can lead to alienation or disengagement from one's work (Aktouf, 1992).

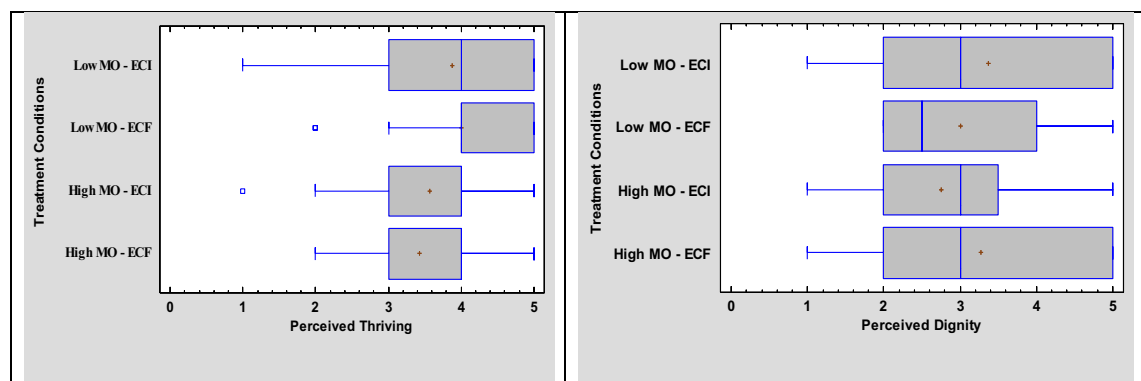


Fig. 2. (Study 2).

Box and whisker plots of Employee flourishing.

Table 3
(Study 2).
Results of Regression Analysis

(A) Perceived Thriving																
Variables	M1				M2				M3				M4			
	coef.	RSE	t	β	coef.	RSE	t	β	coef.	RSE	t	β	coef.	RSE	t	β
Intercept	3.76	0.38	9.89***	.	3.82	0.38	10.05***		3.83	0.40	9.54***		3.83	0.39	9.75***	
Age (mths)	−0.00	0.00	−0.86	−0.13	−0.00	0.00	−0.30	−0.05	−0.00	0.00	−0.42	−0.07	−0.00	0.00	−0.53	−0.09
Org Tenure (mths)	0.00	0.00	0.87	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.68	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.75	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.70	0.09
Org Type (dum)	0.12	0.41	0.31	0.04	−0.09	0.43	−0.20	−0.03	−0.10	0.45	−0.22	−0.03	−0.06	0.45	−0.13	−0.02
Org Size	0.00	0.00	2.63**	−0.11	−0.00	0.00	−0.91	−0.06	−0.00	0.00	−0.91	−0.06	−0.00	0.00	−0.78	−0.05
Moral obligation (MO)					−0.21	0.10	−1.98**	−0.30	−0.20	0.11	−1.86*	−0.30	−0.21	0.11	−2.01**	−0.31
Enabling conditions (EC)					0.17	0.23	0.73	0.13	0.18	0.24	0.76	0.14	0.13	0.25	0.5	0.10
Org resp. (OR)					0.38	0.47	0.80	0.11	0.32	0.44	0.73	0.10	−0.02	0.52	−0.03	−0.01
MO x EC									0.09	0.54	0.16	0.02	0.28	0.56	0.51	0.07
MO x OR									0.19	0.26	0.76	0.11	0.21	0.28	0.76	0.12
EC x OR									0.00	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.00
MO x EC x OR													0.35	0.29	1.19	0.18
R ²	0.03				0.09				0.11				0.12			
ΔR^2					0.06				0.01				0.01			
F	1.98				1.96				1.62				1.49			
df	4.54				7.51				9.49				10.48			
ΔF					1.19				0.39				0.72			
Δdf					3.51				2.49				1.48			

(B) Perceived Dignity																
Variables	M1				M2				M3				M4			
	coef.	RSE	t	β	coef.	RSE	t	β	coef.	RSE	t	β	coef.	RSE	t	β
Intercept	3.80	0.64	5.95***		3.86	0.62	6.19***		3.83	0.64	5.94***		3.83	0.65	5.93***	
Age (mths)	−0.00	0.00	−1.69*	−0.23	−0.00	0.00	−1.11	−0.16	−0.00	0.00	−1.20	−0.18	−0.00	0.00	−1.26	−0.19
Org Tenure (mths)	0.00	0.00	−0.12	−0.01	−0.00	0.00	−0.24	−0.03	−0.00	0.00	−0.06	−0.01	−0.00	0.00	−0.12	−0.01
Org Type (dum)	−0.27	0.67	−0.41	−0.07	−0.48	0.66	−0.73	−0.12	−0.50	0.68	−0.73	−0.12	−0.47	0.69	−0.68	−0.11
Org Size	0.00	0.00	1.98**	0.14	0.00	0.00	1.77*	0.18	0.00	0.00	1.73*	0.20	0.00	0.00	1.70*	0.20
Moral obligation (MO)					−0.21	0.14	−1.45	−0.24	−0.20	0.15	−1.35	−0.23	−0.21	0.15	−1.37	−0.24
Enabling conditions (EC)					0.05	0.27	0.19	0.03	0.08	0.28	0.28	0.05	0.04	0.30	0.14	0.02
Org resp. (OR)					0.35	0.46	0.78	0.08	0.22	0.45	0.50	0.05	−0.03	0.55	−0.06	−0.01
MO x EC									0.97	0.78	1.24	0.18	1.11	0.80	1.39	0.20
MO x OR									−0.16	0.25	−0.67	−0.07	−0.15	0.27	−0.56	−0.07
EC x OR									0.00			0.00	0.00			0.00
MO x EC x OR													0.26	0.44	0.60	0.10
R ²	0.09				0.13				0.15				0.15			
ΔR^2					0.04				0.02				0.00			
F	2.14				1.45				1.39				1.16			
df	4.55				7.52				9.50				10.49			
ΔF					0.87				0.51				0.25			
Δdf					3.52				2.50				1.49			

Employees who experience work meaningfulness are likely to view their work as significant or purposeful (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Studies show that an organizational culture (e.g., supportive, learning orientation) that reflects a shared pattern of meanings and values is important for individuals to find work meaningful (Cardador & Rupp, 2011; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). When organizations create supportive and learning climates out of moral obligation, they enable work that is meaningful to employees. Such meaningful work then induces employees to utilize their strengths, develop their capabilities, and experience positive functioning (Michaelson, 2019). It also satisfies their need for control, belongingness, and meaningful existence. Positive meaning helps employees to reappraise the pandemic as a growth opportunity rather than as a probable loss. Indeed, several studies show meaningful work as a mediator (Arnold et al., 2007; Hirschi, 2012; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2016) that includes the original job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). It is therefore likely that:

Hypothesis 2. Perceived work meaningfulness mediates the relationship between moral obligation and employee flourishing in organizations.

6.2. Moderation of organizational responsiveness

Second, we used a cross-sectional approach to examine the three-way interactions that were not significant in the experiment. Organizational responsiveness refers to the degree to which an organization reacts to changes in a business environment (Bernardes & Hanna, 2009). The purpose of the reaction may be to seize potential opportunities or to improve the well-being of its members. Studies have shown organizations to be responsive to environmental concerns (Bansal & Roth, 2000), poverty (Lobel, 2013), work–family issues (Ingram & Simons, 1995), and technological changes (Orlandi, 2016). In our studies, we focused on the responsiveness of organizations to the flourishing of employees during extreme conditions. We define organizational responsiveness as an organization's proactive interaction with its internal and external environments to enhance employee flourishing. Organizations are likely to respond to the opportunities and threats posed by extreme conditions (e.g., pandemics) to minimize costs associated with the reduced commitment that comes from a perceived lack of responsiveness to employee needs.

Responsive organizations may persist in the creation of processes and systems that enhance employee flourishing and continue doing so even with a high moral obligation. One reason for this is that organizations have a moral obligation to ensure employee well-being (Goh et al., 2015; Jain et al., 2009). In addition, employees have a moral obligation to care for their goals by cultivating abilities, and self-cultivation is effectuated through meaningful work. The opportunity cost proposition contends that responsive organizations also have a duty to help employees, and thus, the organizations are likely, for that and reasons of moral obligation, to empower employees to harness their capabilities (Michaelson, 2021). To the extent that the organization is a source of various opportunities, it facilitates meaningfulness when employees are helped to maximize their potential. In contrast, unresponsive organizations may not initiate or persist in creating meaningful work for employees and will be unlikely to provide such opportunities.

6.3. Moderation of enabling conditions

The effect of this interaction depends on the type of enabling conditions—facilitative or inhibitive. Research in meaningfulness suggests that enabling conditions support meaningful work (Hackman, 2002; Rob, 2013). Further, Spreitzer et al. (2005: 539) argued, 'If the right enabling conditions and resources are present, there is an increased likelihood that individuals will thrive [flourish], even under these onerous conditions.' Facilitative conditions, such as leader support of employee family responsibilities to improve employee outcomes; a safe and supportive environment for shared meaning-making; effective boundary management; and engaging, invigorating, and inspiring employees, create meaning for employees (Guo et al., 2024; Rob, 2013; Rofcanin et al., 2018). These factors rouse responsive organizations' senses of obligation and autonomy to sacrifice resources to establish practices and processes that make work meaningful for employees, even if doing so causes discomfort. For example, Duan et al. (2022) showed how leader consultation is an essential condition that facilitates employees' sense of belonging in a responsive work environment and promotes proactive behaviors (e.g., constructive voice). Indeed, such conditions enable organizations to help employees develop their capabilities and exploit opportunities for growth. Employees are thus likely to experience heightened meaning in work and flourish. If facilitative conditions exist in unresponsive organizations, the positive effects of moral obligation might be tempered, resulting in less sense of meaningful work.

In contrast, inhibitive conditions, such as restrictive cultures, authoritarian leadership, and rigid policies (Hodson, 2001), impede the creation of meaningful work, even if the organization is responsive. The degree to which moral obligation prompts an organization to create meaningful work is likely to be tempered by the constraining forces of inhibitive conditions (Ciulla, 2019). Such inhibitive conditions dampen the organization's moral obligations and aggravate the diminishing effect of unresponsiveness. At low levels of moral obligation, unresponsiveness and inhibitive conditions are likely to be associated with less meaningfulness of work than at high levels of moral obligation and organizational responsiveness. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3. The relationship between the perceived moral obligation of an organization and employee thriving is moderated jointly by organizational responsiveness and enabling conditions such that employee flourishing is greater when moral obligation is high, enabling conditions are facilitative, and organizations are responsive rather than when moral obligation is low, conditions are inhibitive, and responsiveness is low.

6.4. Data and procedure

Between June and July 2020, we surveyed 230 workers from various organizations in Ghana. Ethical approval was obtained for this study and Study 4, and all participants provided informed consent indicating voluntary participation. The sample after the second round was one hundred and twenty-five responses. After removing missing cases ($n = 13$), our total sample was one hundred and twelve ($N = 112$).

6.5. Measures

The mediator, *meaningful work*, was measured with 10-items adapted from Lips-Wiersma and Wright's (2012) comprehensive meaningful work scale ($\alpha = 0.80$). Respondents rated the degree to which they agreed with statements about how work in their organizations is meaningful using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). A sample item is "I experience a sense of achievement." Four items ($\alpha = 0.75$) measured expressing full potential, two items ($\alpha = 0.51$) measured developing self, and four items ($\alpha = 0.80$) measured inspiration. Cronbach's alpha for the overall 8-item scale was ($\alpha = 0.83$). The two dimensions correlate moderately ($r = 0.46$, $p < 0.0001$).

Items for *organizational responsiveness* toward COVID-19 were adapted from Bansal and Roth (2000) and Ingram and Simons (1995). They examined responsiveness toward environmental concerns and work-family issues respectively in the West. So, we modified their scales to fit the African context and the COVID19 situation. The initial 12-item scale that comprises of positive (*responsiveness* - $n = 6$) and negative (*unresponsiveness* - $n = 6$) components were reduced to eight items after two validation studies due to low loadings of some items from each factor. Responsiveness is positive and focuses on the degree of heedfulness while unresponsiveness is negative and focuses on inattentiveness or lack of heedfulness of organizations. In this study, three items measured responsiveness ($\alpha = 0.898$) and four items ($\alpha = 0.923$) measured unresponsiveness. Samples items were "the organization pays attention to situations of employees" and "the organization is insensitive." CFA results showed a two-factor loading based on the Satorra-Bentler estimator ($\chi^2 = 16.95$, $df = 15$; $RMSEA_SB = 0.029$; $AIC = 3960.84$, $BIC = 4048.3$; $CFI_SB = 0.993$, $TLI_SB = 0.988$). The two factors correlate moderately and negatively ($r = -0.44$, $p < 0.001$).

Enabling conditions include characteristics of the environment that facilitate action including resources required to attain specific behavior or outcome. We measured it with eight items which asked respondents to indicate the degree to which their organizations created conditions that facilitated or inhibited work during the COVID-19 pandemic using a 9-point Likert scale -3 = Inhibits greatly, -2 = Inhibits moderately, -1 = Inhibits less, 0 = Neither inhibits nor facilitates, 1 = Facilitates less, 2 = Facilitates moderately, 3 = Facilitates greatly. The eight items were culled from the COVID19 pandemic literature to reflect four dimensions - health, infrastructure, policy, and protocol. In this study, the reliabilities of the health ($\alpha = 0.72$), infrastructure ($\alpha = 0.79$), policy ($\alpha = 0.76$) and protocol ($\alpha = 0.88$) dimensions. A similar approach was adopted by Bobitt, Carter, & Kuhne, (2020) in the study of contextual influences on cannabis use. Correlations among the factors ranged from moderate ($r = 0.486$, $p < 0.0001$) to high ($r = 0.845$, $p < 0.0001$). However, based on CFA analysis using the Satorra-Bentler estimator suggested a one-factor model ($\chi^2 = 45.7$, $df = 15$; $RMSEA_SB = 0.10$; $AIC = 4328.54$, $BIC = 4417.21$; $CFI_SB = 0.94$, $TLI_SB = 0.88$) was better than a two-factor model ($\chi^2 = 64.31$, $df = 18$; $RMSEA_SB = 0.18$; $AIC = 2237.35$, $BIC = 2293.296$; $CFI_SB = 0.86$, $TLI_SB = 0.78$). The reliability of the overall scale was $\alpha = 0.90$.

Moral obligation was measured with eight items where respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which their organizations were obliged morally to respond to COVID-19 using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = low moral obligation; 4 = moderate moral obligation; 7 = high moral obligation). The eight items were culled from the COVID19 pandemic literature to reflect the four dimensions - health, infrastructure, policy, and protocol. The reliabilities of the health ($\alpha = 0.72$), infrastructure ($\alpha = 0.79$), policy ($\alpha = 0.76$) and protocol ($\alpha = 0.88$) were high. Correlations ranged from moderate ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.0001$) to high ($r = 0.84$, $p < 0.0001$). CFA results showed a one-factor loading based on the Satorra-Bentler estimator ($\chi^2 = 23.75$, $df = 15$; $RMSEA_SB = 0.061$; $AIC = 4462.738$, $BIC = 4551.370$; $CFI_SB = 0.98$, $TLI_SB = 0.96$) better than a two-factor model ($\chi^2 = 58.31$, $df = 18$; $RMSEA_SB = 0.15$; $AIC = 2231.35$, $BIC = 2298.296$; $CFI_SB = 0.84$, $TLI_SB = 0.76$). In this study, the reliability of the overall scale was $\alpha = 0.91$.

6.6. Analytic technique

We adopted two techniques to test the hypotheses. First, we dichotomized moral obligation and enabling conditions after standardizing them to obtain two attitude measures, high-low moral obligation, and two situation measures, inhibitive and facilitative conditions. From the crossing of these two categories, four conditions or groups were obtained: two of consistency, where organizational attribute and situation are consonant (low moral obligation-inhibition and high moral obligation-facilitation), and two high conflicts, where attribute and situation were dissonant (low moral obligation-facilitation and high moral obligation-inhibition). We then checked the effect of the four variables on the criterion—*meaningfulness of work*—to determine the influence of the interactive variables. The four categories were low moral obligation-inhibitive enabling condition, low moral obligation-facilitative enabling condition, high moral obligation-inhibitive enabling condition, and high moral obligation-facilitative enabling condition. The differences between each of the four groups of the independent variable were significant at the level of 0.05.

Further, they show interactive effects. Under inhibitive conditions, ratings of meaningful work are higher when moral obligation is low but under facilitative conditions, meaningful work is higher when moral obligation is high (Fig. 4A). Ratings of flourishing are higher under inhibitive conditions when moral obligation is low but lower under facilitative conditions when moral obligation is high (see Fig. 4B). Fig. 5 shows the structural equation model of drivers of employee flourishing.

6.7. Results

Table 4a shows the descriptive statistics and correlations of variables in the study. The correlation coefficients indicate the strength of association between the variables. They show small to moderate associations at the $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.10$ levels.

The robust regression results (Table 4b) show that the control variables do not relate at a significant level with meaningfulness of work. However, low moral obligation-facilitative condition (MOL-ECF) relates positively to meaningfulness of work ($coef. = 0.34$, $RSE = 0.20$, $t = 1.71$, $p < 0.10$; $\beta = 0.41$) albeit not strongly. It suggests that relative to the low moral obligation-inhibitive condition (MOL-ECI) group, meaningful work is higher in organizations characterized by MOL-ECF. The high moral obligation-inhibitive condition (MOH-ECI) group also relates positively to meaningfulness of work ($coef. = 0.38$, $RSE = 0.16$, $t = 2.39$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.25$) suggesting that relative to the MOL-ECI group, meaningful work is higher in organizations characterized by MOH-ECI. Lastly, high moral obligation-facilitative condition (MOH-ECF) group relates positively to meaningfulness of work ($coef. = 0.39$, $RSE = 0.18$, $t = 2.13$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.48$) suggesting that meaningfulness of work is higher in organizations in this group than the reference group, MOL-ECI.

To test the hypothesis, we conducted 3-way moderator analysis using the components of meaningfulness of work - expressing full potential, developing self, and inspiration - as criteria. The inspiration criterion was not significant. The results of the significant interactions are shown in Table 4a and 4b. In addition to significant 2-way interactions, the 3-way interaction involving moral obligation, organizational responsiveness, and enabling conditions is significant in relating to the developing self ($coef. = -0.26$, $RSE = 0.10$, $t = 2.62$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = -0.48$). However, the effect is negative. The plot (see Fig. 6a) shows that the effect of moral obligation on meaningfulness of work (i.e., developing self) is negative for those in organizations with low responsiveness-high enabling (i.e., facilitative) conditions (ORL-ECF) and low responsiveness-low enabling (i.e., inhibitive) conditions (ORL-ECI) but positive for those in organizations with high responsiveness-low inhibitive conditions (ORH-ECI) while flat for those in organizations with high responsiveness-high enabling (i.e., facilitative) conditions (ORH-ECF). There is also a significant 3-way interaction in relating to the *expressing full potential* component of meaningfulness. As shown in Table 4b the product term is positive and significant ($coef. = 0.24$, $RSE = 0.10$, $t = 2.48$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = -0.43$). The plot (Fig. 6b) shows a similar pattern. However, the slopes for ORL-ECI and ORH-ECF are positive suggesting that as moral obligation increases, expressing full potential increases for those in organizations characterized by ORH-ECF and ORL-ECI. *Expressing full potential* decreases for employees in organizations characterized by ORH-ECI and ORL-ECF.

In addition to these linear interactions we found, through supplementary analysis¹ (Appendix 2), that meaningful work, organizational responsiveness, and enabling conditions show curvilinear patterns (Fig. 7). Curvilinear interaction analysis showed significant quadratic effect of moral obligation ($coef. = 0.13$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 2.78$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.31$), interaction of enabling conditions ($coef. = -2.14$, $SE = 1.12$, $t = -1.92$, $p < 0.06$; $\beta = -0.51$), three-way linear ($coef. = 1.31$, $SE = 0.50$, $t = 2.61$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.65$) and three-way curvilinear ($coef. = 0.60$, $SE = 0.32$, $t = 1.85$, $p < 0.07$; $\beta = 0.73$) interactions. Fig. 7A shows that employee thriving is high at low and high levels of moral obligation but low at moderate levels of the latter. This effect is the same for employees in organization with low (i.e., inhibitive) enabling conditions (see Fig. 7B). For employees in organizations with high (i.e., facilitative) enabling conditions employee thriving is highest at moderate levels of moral obligation; at low and high levels of moral obligation, employee thriving is low. The three-way linear interaction shows that the relationship between moral obligation and employee thriving differs for organizations rated as having high versus low enabling conditions and high versus low responsiveness (see Fig. 7C). Employee thriving is highest in low (inhibitive) enabling conditions-low organizational responsiveness when moral obligation is low. The simple slope is significant ($t = -2.37$, $p < 0.02$). At high levels of moral obligation employee thriving is highest for organizations rated as having high (facilitative) enabling conditions-low organizational responsiveness. The simple slope is significant ($t = 6.02$, $p < 0.04$). The three-way curvilinear interaction shows that the relationship between moral obligation and employee thriving is u-shaped for employees in organizations with high (facilitative) enabling conditions and high responsiveness but inverted u-shaped for employees in organizations with high enabling conditions and low responsiveness (see Fig. 7D). The u-shaped pattern is also associated with low (inhibitive) enabling conditions and organizational responsiveness. Both the linear and curvilinear interactions support hypothesis 3.

7. Study 4: Replication

We replicated the experiment (Study 2) in a different location—Accra, Ghana.

7.1. Method

7.1.1. Design, procedure, and manipulation

We used the same design, materials, and procedure as in Study 2. Due to the pandemic restrictions, the sessions were remote in this replication ($N = 81$) as in Study 2. One-way ANOVA assessed the extent to which participants were confident in the manipulation of moral obligation ($F[1, 63] = 0.79$, $p < 0.38$) and enabling conditions ($F[1, 63] = 7.16$, $p < 0.009$); goodness of the organization based on its moral obligation ($F[1, 63] = 0.97$, $p < 0.33$) and enabling conditions ($F[1, 63] = 42.59$, $p < 0.0001$); and perception of the moral obligation of the organization described in the scenario ($F[1, 63] = 25.01$, $p < 0.0001$), as well as the facilitative ($F[1, 63] = 36.88$, $p < 0.0001$) and inhibitive ($F[1, 63] = 0.50$, $p < 0.72$) conditions, suggesting that the manipulation worked. Further, perception of the response behavior of the organization described in the scenario showed that Condition 4 had a higher mean (6.07 , $SD = 0.23$) than

¹ Interested readers may request the results from the 1st author.

Table 4
Regression Results (Study 3).

(A) Descriptive Statistics and Correlations																
Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10					
1	Work experience	1.00														
2	Org Tenure	−0.14	1.00													
3	Job Tenure	−0.07	0.33**	1.00												
4	Meaningful Work (MW)	−0.08	0.03	0.01	1.00											
5	Moral Obligation (MO)	0.04	−0.01	0.04	0.23*	1.00										
6	Enabling Conditions (EC)	0.05	0.13	0.20	0.29**	0.54***	1.00									
7	Org. Responsiveness (OR)	0.00	−0.10	−0.02	0.03	0.27**	0.06	1.00								
8	Dignity (Foreign) (Df)	0.08	0.05	−0.01	−0.10	−0.08	0.01	−0.24*	1.00							
9	Dignity (Traditional) (Dt)	0.04	−0.04	−0.03	−0.07	−0.09	−0.02	−0.19*	0.84*	1.00						
10	Employee Flourishing (EF)	−0.15	−0.01	−0.09	0.41***	0.21*	0.23*	−0.04	0.17+	0.30**	1.00					
	M	1.72	1.24	1.46	−0.06	−0.19	−0.28	0.02	5.82	6.06	5.28					
	SD	0.45	0.58	0.81	1.04	0.50	0.52	1.03	0.96	0.98	1.30					
	Min	1.00	1.00	1.00	−2.82	−1.61	−1.81	−3.38	4.00	4.00	1.00					
	Max	2.00	5.00	5.00	2.71	1.62	0.43	3.11	7.00	7.00	7.00					

(B). Curvilinear Interaction Effect on Perceived Employee Dignity

		Dignity (Traditional)															
Variables		Coef.	RSE	t	Beta	Coef.	RSE	t	Beta	Coef.	RSE	t	Beta	Coef.	RSE	t	Beta
Intercept		6.01	0.19	31.91***	.	6.07	0.20	31.07***	.	6.05	0.23	26.14***	.	6.11	0.24	25.32***	.
MW		−0.31	0.15	−2.12*	−0.29	−0.55	0.40	−1.37	−0.50	−1.00	0.47	−2.12	−0.92	−0.73	0.47	−1.56	−0.67
OR		0.16	0.13	1.24	0.16	0.17	0.14	1.17	0.16	0.21	0.20	1.02	0.20	0.15	0.16	0.90	0.14
EC		0.12	0.17	0.71	0.11	0.14	0.17	0.81	0.13	−0.04	0.21	−0.21	−0.04	−0.16	0.17	−0.92	−0.14
MW ²						−0.28	0.24	−1.16	−0.87	−0.35	0.30	−1.15	−1.07	−1.33	0.39	−3.42**	−4.12
MW x OR						0.21	0.45	0.48	0.14	1.83	1.01	1.82+	1.22	1.63	0.82	1.99*	1.08
MW x EC						0.79	0.70	1.12	0.64	−0.03	0.54	−0.05	−0.02	0.12	0.50	0.25	0.10
MW ² x OR										−1.55	0.67	−2.3*	−4.20	−1.12	0.46	−2.4*	−3.03
MW ² x EC										1.50	0.57	2.66*	4.85	2.51	0.45	5.64***	8.11
OR x EC										0.10	0.16	0.66	0.11	0.01	0.10	0.14	0.02
MW x OR x EC														−0.52	0.58	−0.89	−0.34
MW ² x OR x EC														2.65	0.74	3.58**	7.27
R ²	0.097					0.154				0.371				0.475			
F(df)	2.05(3,29)					3.57(6,26)*				4.66(9,23)**				17.29(11,21)***			
ΔR ²						0.056				0.217				0.105			
ΔF(df)						0.58(3,26)				2.64(3,23)*				2.09(2,21)*			

(C). Curvilinear Interaction Effect on Perceived Employee Dignity

		Perceived Flourishing															
Variable		Coef.	RSE	t	β	Coef.	RSE	t	β	Coef.	RSE	t	β	Coef.	RSE	t	β
Intercept		5.47	0.14	38.72***	.	5.27	0.15	35.36***	.	5.31	0.17	31.9***	.	5.30	0.17	31.82***	.
MW		0.31	0.18	1.72+	0.36	0.55	0.14	3.91**	0.63	0.84	0.30	2.81*	0.95	0.87	0.31	2.81*	0.99
OR		0.21	0.12	1.84+	0.26	0.23	0.09	2.44*	0.28	0.21	0.13	1.62	0.25	0.22	0.14	1.57	0.26

(continued on next page)

Table 4 (continued)

(C). Curvilinear Interaction Effect on Perceived Employee Dignity																
Variable	Perceived Flourishing															
	Coef.	RSE	t	β	Coef.	RSE	t	β	Coef.	RSE	t	β	Coef.	RSE	t	β
EC	0.01	0.14	0.09	0.01	−0.04	0.11	−0.36	−0.04	0.06	0.12	0.50	0.06	0.07	0.13	0.53	0.08
MW ²					0.29	0.12	2.32*	1.11	0.23	0.23	1.01	0.87	−0.04	0.24	−0.17	−0.16
MW x OR					−1.22	0.35	−3.47**	−1.00	−1.89	0.60	−3.16**	−1.56	−2.30	0.72	−3.2**	−1.89
MW x EC					0.29	0.29	1.01	0.29	0.62	0.43	1.45	0.62	0.73	0.42	1.71	0.73
MW ² x OR									0.53	0.40	1.35	1.80	0.64	0.42	1.52	2.16
MW ² x EC									−0.64	0.31	−2.08*	−2.57	−0.34	0.32	−1.07	−1.37
OR x EC									0.00	0.09	−0.05	−0.01	−0.04	0.08	−0.43	−0.05
MW x OR x EC													0.58	0.67	0.87	0.47
MW ² x OR x EC													0.96	0.52	1.84+	3.27
R ²	0.22				0.52				0.590				0.62			
F(df)	2.8(3,29)				10.13(6,26)***				34.83(3,26)***				34.09(11,21)***			
ΔR ²					0.300				0.070				0.030			
ΔF(df)					5.49(3,26)***				1.24(3,23)				0.73(2,21)			

MW = Work meaningfulness, OR = organizational responsiveness, EC = enabling conditions, MO = moral obligation.

* p < 0.05.

** p < 0.01.

*** p < 0.001.

Condition 3 ($M = 6.07$, $SD = 0.30$), Condition 2 ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 0.50$), or Condition 1 ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.49$), suggesting the manipulation worked.

7.1.2. Participants

We recruited workers from Accra, the capital city of Ghana, who were participants in an employee development program at a major university. The proportions of operatives, supervisors, and managers were 23.08 %, 43.08 %, and 33.85 %, respectively. Organizational tenure ranges were ≤ 5 years (49.23 %), 6–10 years (36.92 %) and 11–20 years (13.85 %). The attendees were 58.73 % females and 41.27 % males. With regard to age, 4.62 % were ≤ 25 years old, 61.54 % were 25–35, 32.31 % were 36–45, and 2 % were 46–55. Participants were well-educated: 52.31 % had a bachelor's degree, and 46.15 % had a postgraduate degree. Most participants were actively employed (92.31 %), while 2 % and 4.62 % were unemployed and graduate interns, respectively. The participants represented 75.38 % and 24.62 % of local and foreign companies, respectively. Education, public sector, banking, health, mining, and unknown industries were represented by 13 %, 17 %, 12.35 %, 8.82 %, 4.1 %, and 7 % of participants, respectively. Participants from large companies made up 46.88 %, while 31.25 % and 21.88 % were from medium and small companies, respectively.

7.2. Measures

The two criteria were measured the same as for Study 2 (moral obligation: $\alpha = 0.82$; organizational responsiveness: $\alpha = 0.89$ and enabling conditions: $\alpha = 0.79$).

7.3. Results

The box and whisker plot in Fig. 3 shows that the median and mean for perceived thriving and dignity were higher under Condition 1 (low moral obligation–inhibitive enabling conditions) than Condition 4 (high moral obligation–facilitative enabling conditions), despite the same variability. One-way ANOVA showed a significant difference in employee thriving, ($F_{[3, 61]} = 3.31$, $p < 0.0257$), suggesting a difference in the conditions. For employee thriving, the variable in Condition 1 (low moral obligation–inhibitive enabling conditions) was the same as Condition 4 (high moral obligation–facilitative enabling conditions). The mean, however, was higher in the former ($M = 3.80$) than in the latter ($M = 2.88$). ANOVA results revealed a significant main effect of enabling conditions ($F_{[3, 61]} = 8.29$, $p < 0.005$), but not moral obligation ($F_{[3, 61]} = 0.05$, $p < 0.824$). A mean comparison test showed a significant difference of Condition 1, which was higher than Condition 4 (contrast = -0.83 , $SE = 0.39$, $t = -2.14$, $p < 0.036$, 95 % CI = -1.61 – -0.06). Two-way ANOVA further showed only a significant main effect of enabling conditions ($F_{[3, 61]} = 8.29$, $p < 0.005$), but neither moral obligation ($F_{[3, 61]} = 0.05$, $p < 0.62$) nor the interaction ($F_{[3, 61]} = 1.57$, $p < 0.22$) was significant. Regression analysis also showed a significant main effect of Condition 4 (coef. = -0.83 , $SE = 0.32$, $t = -2.62$, $p < 0.011$; $\beta = -0.32$). The beta (β) suggests that relative to Condition 1, a one-unit change in Condition 4 is associated with about a one-third decrease in employee thriving.

With regard to perceived dignity, one-way ANOVA revealed no difference ($F_{[3, 61]} = 2.09$, $p < 0.11$). The box and whisker plot shown in Fig. 3 indicates that the median and mean for perceived dignity were higher in Condition 1 (low moral obligation–inhibitive enabling conditions) than Condition 4 (high moral obligation–facilitative enabling conditions), despite having the same variable. A t -test (mean comparison with hypothesized mean of 2.5, given the effect size of 0.50) showed a significant difference, with Condition 1 higher than Condition 4 (coef. = -0.93 , $SE = 0.42$; $t = -2.21$, $p < 0.03$; 95 % CI = -1.76 – -0.89). Table 5 shows the regression results of both thriving and dignity.

As in Study 2, we expected higher ratings of perceived dignity under Condition 4 than under Condition 1. The results of the replication were the same as those in Study 2: participants in Condition 1 rated perceived dignity higher than those in Condition 4 despite the variability being the same. This suggests that in this study, as in Study 2, exposure to moral obligation and enabling

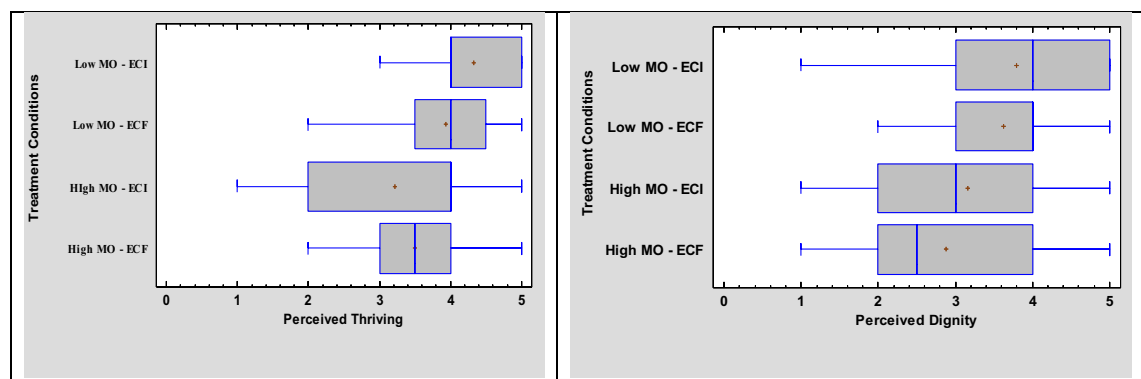
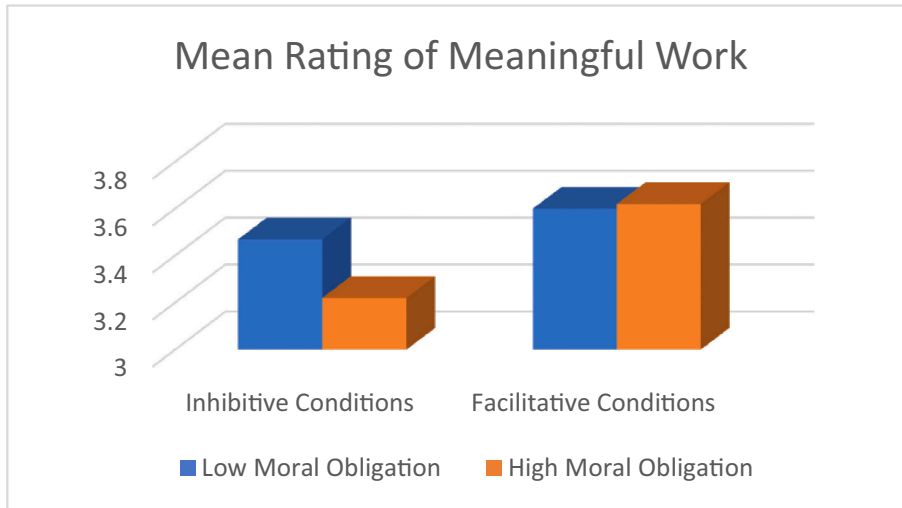


Fig. 3. (Study 4).

Box and whisker plots of Employee flourishing

Notes: MO = Moral obligation; ECI = enabling conditions inhibitive; ECF = enabling conditions facilitative.

A) Meaningfulness of Work



B) Perceived Flourishing

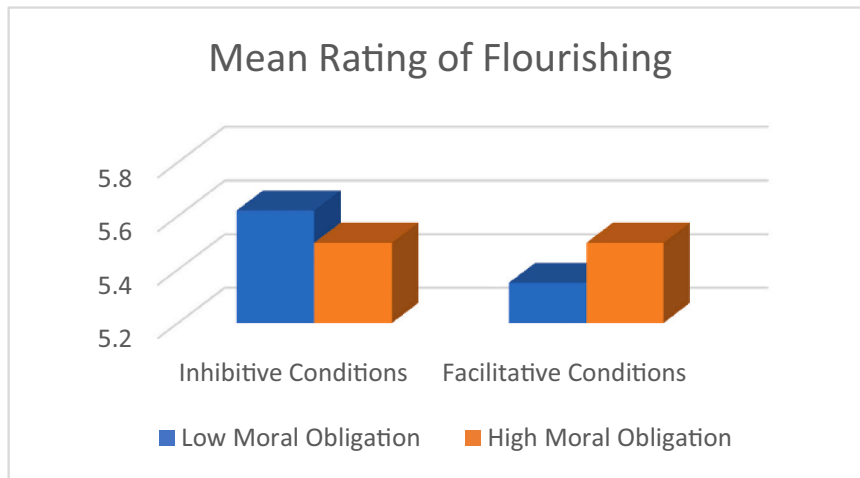


Fig. 4. (Study 3)
Mean ratings of Work Meaningfulness and flourishing under Inhibitive and Facilitative conditions.

conditions of the organization did not have a significant effect on employee dignity. However, we found that moral obligation interacts with enabling conditions and organizational responsiveness in linearly relating to perceived dignity ($coef. = 0.99$, $SE = 0.52$, $t = 1.9$, $p < 0.10$; $\beta = 0.30$).

Fig. 8 shows the plot. The relationship between moral obligation and perceived dignity is positive for organizations with high (facilitative) enabling conditions–high responsiveness but is negative for those with low (inhibitive) enabling conditions–low responsiveness, suggesting that perceived dignity increases in the former condition but decreases in the latter.

Furthermore, regression analysis showed a significant main effect of Condition 4 ($coef. = -0.93$, $SE = 0.42$, $t = -2.19$, $p < 0.033$; $\beta = -0.34$). The beta (β) suggests that compared to Condition 1, a one-unit change in Condition 4 is associated with approximately one-third decrease of perceived dignity. Two-way ANOVA also showed a significant main effect only for enabling conditions ($F_{[1, 61]} = 5.73$, $p < 0.02$), but not moral obligation ($F_{[1, 61]} = 0.65$, $p < 0.42$) or for any interaction ($F_{[1, 61]} = 0.04$, $p < 0.84$). A three-way interaction of moral obligation, enabling conditions, and organizational responsiveness was significant but not robust ($coef. = 0.99$, $SE = 0.52$, $t = 1.90$, $p < 0.10$). The plot (see Fig. 8) shows that the relationship between moral obligation and perceived dignity is positive such that perceived dignity is higher for organizations rated as having better (i.e., facilitative) enabling conditions and high responsiveness than those with inhibitive enabling conditions and low responsiveness. When moral obligation is high, the difference between the two conditions is even greater. Although, not robust, there is support for the hypothesis that perceived moral obligation joins organizational responsiveness and enabling conditions in relating positively to employee flourishing (H3). We expect a

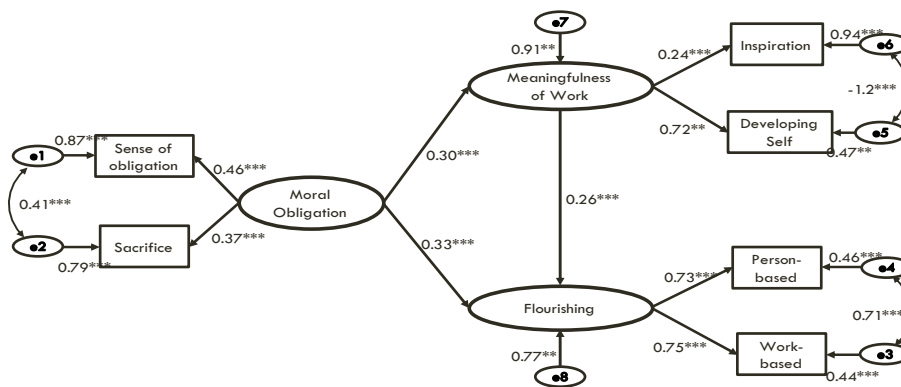


Fig. 5. (Study 3)
Structural Equation Model of Drivers of Employee Flourishing.

synergistic interaction among the three factors, rather than merely additive two-way effects. This synergy is theoretically grounded in the idea that flourishing is most likely when moral intent (obligation), organizational capacity (responsiveness), and contextual support (enabling conditions) align.

The box plots in Fig. 3 and ANOVA results suggest that Condition 1 (low MO–inhibitive conditions) had unexpectedly high thriving and dignity scores. It is a ceiling effect which occurs when a significant portion of participants in the study rated the criteria—thriving and dignity—the highest possible score on the instrument. It is likely the instrument was not sensitive enough to differentiate between individuals whose ratings were at the upper end of the scale, potentially obscuring real differences in flourishing. It may be due to the extreme context—workers’ fear of losing their jobs if they rated lower even though the study was not sponsored by their companies.

In this study the findings of moral obligation and enabling conditions are similar. In addition, there is a three-way linear interaction which was not present in Study 2. It suggests differences between the contexts—Accra and Kumasi.

8. Overall discussion

Extreme conditions such as pandemics upend organizational processes and systems that influence employee behaviors, attitudes, and welfare (McFarland et al., 2020; Trougakos et al., 2020; Vaziri et al., 2020). One important but unexplored outcome is the degree to which employees flourish during such crises. The pandemic was an extreme condition that challenged organizations, and therefore, it called for building an understanding of individual, organizational, and environmental factors that influence employee flourishing (Bierwiazczon et al., 2020; Probst et al., 2020). Using multiple studies, we found complex dynamics involving employees’ perceptions of organizations’ moral obligation, responsiveness, and enabling conditions that influenced their flourishing.

In Study 1, the qualitative findings suggested three themes – moral obligation, organizational responsiveness, and enabling conditions that are likely to relate to employee thriving under the extreme conditions. Even though some employees were worried or stressed about the extreme conditions, others noted that their organizations adopted processes that enhanced their safety. One major question emerging from the study was whether the employees were worried about the responsiveness, moral obligation, and conditions of their employer and any associated shifts. As a result, we conducted an experiment in Study 2 in which we manipulated the conditions of organizational responsiveness and enabling conditions to examine their effect on employee flourishing.

In Study 2, the experimental findings on the effect of moral obligation showed that ratings of employee flourishing as indicated by dignity were lower in the high moral obligation conditions than the low moral obligation conditions. For example, ratings in Condition 1 had a higher mean than in Condition 4, although it also showed greater variability. That is the inhibitive effect. However, ratings of organization responsiveness are highest with high moral obligation–facilitative enabling, which is due to the facilitative effect of enabling conditions. Nevertheless, there was a main effect of moral obligation on employee flourishing, although it was negative. Exposure to the moral obligation and enabling conditions of the organization had no significant effect on employee flourishing, which is consistent with more dominant extreme conditions. As a result of the initial shock effect associated with relatively high mortality rates of the extreme condition, individuals’ perceptions of its impact changed (Finck & Tillmann, 2022) and probably shifted attributions of organizations’ moral obligation.

In Study 3, we found that the three-way interaction which did not manifest in the experiment (i.e., Study 2) was present in the cross-sectional study (Study 3) as indicated by expressing full potential and developing self of work meaningfulness. The effect of moral obligation on developing self is negative for those in organizations with low responsiveness–high enabling conditions as well as low responsiveness–low enabling (i.e., inhibitive) conditions but positive for those in organizations with high responsiveness–low inhibitive conditions while flat for those in organizations with high responsiveness–high enabling (i.e., facilitative) conditions. There is also a significant linear 3-way interaction in relating to the expressing full potential component of meaningfulness. As moral obligation increases, expressing full potential increases for those in organizations characterized by ORH-ECF and ORL-ECI but expressing full potential decreases for employees in organizations characterized by ORH-ECI and ORL-ECF.

The curvilinear interactions show an inverted u-shape for employees in organizations with high responsiveness and low enabling (i.

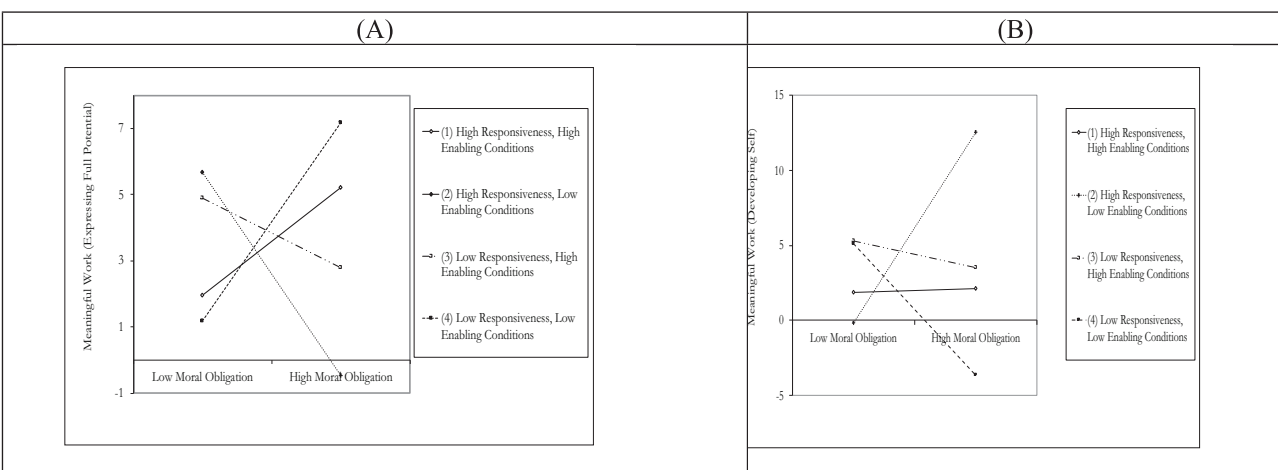


Fig. 6. (Study 3)
Results of 3-Way Linear Interactions of Moral Obligation, Responsiveness, and Enabling Conditions on Meaningful Work (Study 3).

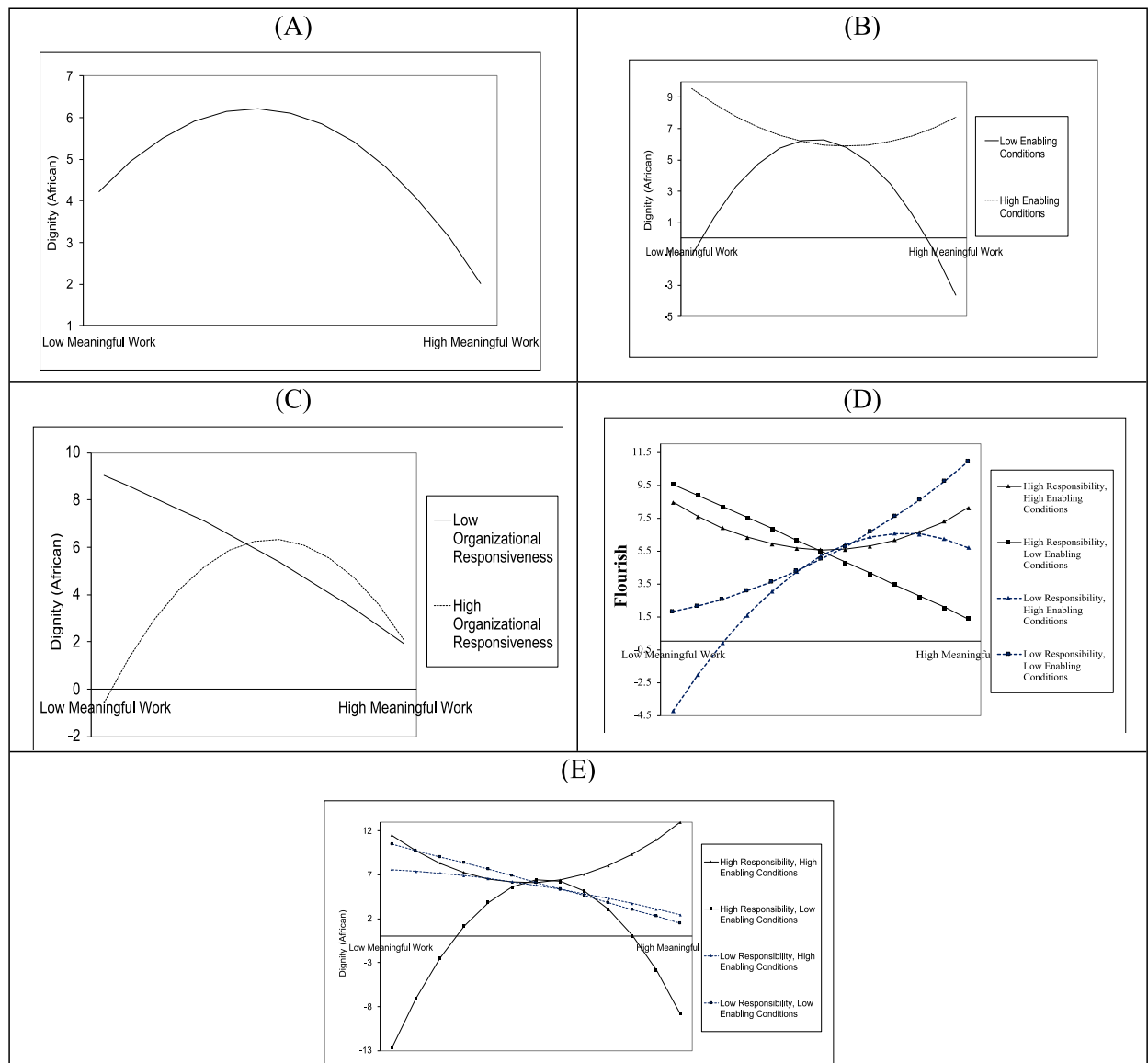


Fig. 7. (Study 3)
Curvilinear Interactions of Meaningfulness of Work, Moral Obligation, and Enabling Conditions.

e., inhibitive) conditions such that perceived dignity is optimal at moderate levels of meaningfulness of work. However, perceived dignity is u-shaped for employees in organizations with high responsiveness and high enabling (i.e., facilitative) conditions such that perceived dignity is lowest at moderate levels of meaningfulness of work. For such employees perceived dignity decreases before increasing. Less robust curves are observed for employees in organizations defined by low responsiveness and facilitative conditions as well as those in organizations with high responsiveness and inhibitive conditions. A similar pattern is observed regarding perceived flourishing. There are very robust curvatures (inverted u-shape and u-shape) for employees in organizations with low responsiveness–high enabling conditions and high responsiveness–high enabling conditions respectively. A less robust u-shape curve is observed for employees in organizations defined by low responsiveness–low enabling conditions. These findings seem major contributions given that the literature lacks such dynamics (Michaelson, 2019). Further, they show the challenge of managing organizations in extreme contexts (i.e., during a pandemic). From a practical viewpoint, it shows that organizations must go beyond moral rhetoric and demonstrate care through responsive actions and supportive environments.

In the replication experiment (Study 4), we observed linear three-way interactions involving moral obligation, organizational responsiveness, and enabling conditions. These fit the linear moderations in Study 3. The dynamics showed positive effects for organizations perceived as having high levels of moral obligation, enabling conditions, and responsiveness.

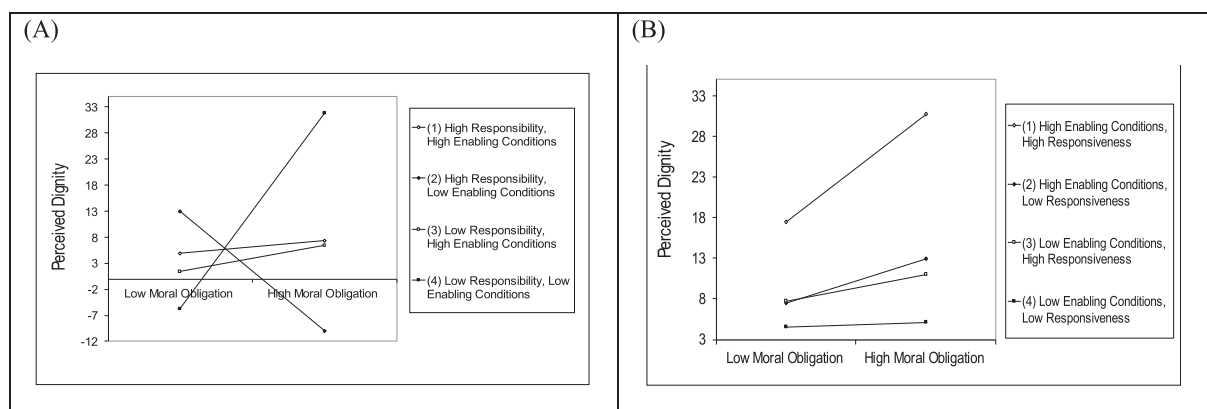


Fig. 8. (Study 4)
Results of linear interactions.

8.1. Theoretical contributions

Our studies made contributions to both theory and research. First, the employee flourishing literature is enhanced by the dynamics we observed in these studies. Understanding how psychological and organizational processes affect employee flourishing is significant, given current extreme conditions (Vaziri et al., 2020). Pandemics challenge organizations such that those organizations genuinely concerned about their employees' welfare are likely to establish processes, systems, and programs that enable employees to flourish despite the crisis. However, research has shown that some organizations are either not able to respond positively (Probst et al., 2020) or refuse to do so (Bierwiaczonek et al., 2020). The moral obligation of organizations is what might prompt them to respond in a way that makes work meaningful and facilitates employees thriving. By proposing and testing an additional indicator, we extend that literature. Spreitzer et al.'s (2012) dimensions are vitality and learning. We showed that, consistent with the positive organizational scholarship paradigm (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2003), dignity is an additional indicator of employee flourishing. Indeed, Spreitzer et al. (2012) suggested exploration of additional indicators and outcomes of employee thriving.

Second, the complex dynamic models we found in these studies show that employee thriving is not simple; rather, it is a function of multiple factors that sometimes join linearly. The dynamics are particularly significant in the context of high levels of uncertainty such as a pandemic. Organizations that feel morally obliged to help employees are likely to make changes that enable employees to flourish (Bowie, 2019). Our studies support that view, showing a positive relationship between moral obligation and employee flourishing. The dynamics also relate to meaningfulness of work and fit well with propositions on meaningfulness of work in organizations. Michaelson (2019), for example, questioned whether employees must do meaningful work, suggesting that there are positive and negative effects of meaningful work. Recent studies further support the importance of job design and contextual factors in shaping meaningful work and engagement (Cotić et al., 2025; Laker et al., 2024). We found that work meaningfulness increases up to a point and decreases for some organizations, while in other organizations, it first decreases before increasing. Our findings challenge linear models and suggest that in emerging contexts, flourishing is more contingent on the dynamic interplay of ethical behavior, support, and context.

In addition, we provide evidence about the dynamics of meaningful work and employee thriving in contrast to the linear effects observed in Western contexts. The 3-way linear and curvilinear interactions we observe support the view that phenomena in Africa are dynamic (Nkomo et al., 2015; Zoogah et al., 2015) and research should therefore approach Africa through a dynamic perspective. The dynamic view fits with the syncretism of historical, geographic, and cultural phenomena of Africa. Further, the literature on meaningfulness is enhanced by the African perspective, where the moral ideal of MAAT (Karenga, 2004) outlines how individuals and organizations should respond to situations and employee welfare includes the promotion of thriving, particularly in times of great uncertainty. The African moral philosophy (MAAT) is a powerful contribution that reframes dominant Western theories of well-being and responsibility. It fits with the collectivistic orientation of African culture.

Another theoretical contribution centers on the separation of moral conditions from meaningfulness of work. Ciulla (2019: 23) argued for 'separating ethical work or the moral conditions of work from the concept of meaningful work' to avoid problems of characterization of meaningful work. The empirical evidence in these studies supports that proposition. Not only are the associations (i.e., correlations) small to moderate, but their effects on employee thriving are different.

Third, the geographic context of the study makes a contribution (Johns, 2012). Research suggests that emerging contexts (e.g., Africa) can be a laboratory to test the validity of Western theories (Barnard et al., 2017). We found in these studies that the linear predictions of employee thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005; Spreitzer et al., 2012) seem different in the emerging context of Ghana. Employee thriving is affected by multiple factors (situation, organization, motivation) that jointly determine the nature of thriving. Theoretically, we show how theories developed in foreign contexts must be revised consistent with the characteristics of local contexts. While some contexts are characterized by linear relationships, others are defined by dynamics. One context where such dynamics seem endemic is Africa (Zoogah et al., 2015). The syncretic historical, geographic, cultural, and institutional processes of Africa result in dynamics related to individual and organizational phenomenon (De Sardan, 1999; Lentz, 2015).

Table 5
(Study 4).
Regression Results.

(A) Interactions on Perceived Thriving																
Variables	M1				M2				M3				M4			
	coef.	RSE	t	β	coef.	RSE	t	β	coef.	RSE	t	β	coef.	RSE	t	β
Intercept	3.74	0.33	11.21***		3.62	0.34	10.67***		3.61	0.35	10.46***		3.59	0.35	10.15***	
Age (mths)	0.00	0.00	0.57	0.08	0.00	0.00	0.49	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.53	0.08	0.00	0.00	0.52	0.08
Org Tenure(mths)	-0.00	0.00	-0.63	-0.11	-0.00	0.00	-0.66	-0.10	-0.00	0.00	-0.59	-0.10	-0.00	0.00	-0.54	-0.09
Org Type(dum)	0.12	0.33	0.37	0.05	0.32	0.35	0.93	0.12	0.31	0.36	0.86	0.12	0.33	0.38	0.88	0.13
Org Size	-0.00	0.00	-0.51	-0.09	-0.00	0.00	-0.55	-0.08	-0.00	0.00	-0.55	-0.08	-0.00	0.00	-0.54	-0.07
Moral obligation (MO)					-0.22	0.09	-2.40**	-0.28	-0.23	0.10	-2.36**	-0.29	-0.22	0.09	-2.37**	-0.28
Enabling conditions (EC)					-0.22	0.17	-1.29	-0.18	-0.18	0.19	-0.98	-0.15	-0.16	0.22	-0.75	-0.13
Org resp. (OR)					0.15	0.39	0.37	0.04	0.20	0.46	0.44	0.06	0.21	0.46	0.45	0.06
MO x EC									0.24	0.47	0.50	0.06	0.36	0.69	0.52	0.09
MO x OR									0.13	0.42	0.30	0.04	0.14	0.46	0.31	0.05
EC x OR									0.00	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.00
MO x EC x OR													0.14	0.53	0.26	0.04
R ²	0.02				0.17				0.17				0.17			
ΔR^2					0.15				0.00				0.00			
F	0.25				1.89				1.60				1.46			
df	4.59				7.55				9.53				10.52			
ΔF					3.27**				0.13				0.06			
Δdf					3.55				2.53				1.52			

(B) Interactions on Perceived Dignity																
Variables	M1				M2				M3				M4			
	coef.	RSE	t	β	coef.	RSE	t	β	coef.	RSE	t	β	coef.	RSE	t	β
Intercept	-0.03	0.33	-0.09		-0.09	0.31	-0.30		-0.09	0.32	-0.27		-0.26	0.31	-0.84	
Age (mths)	0.00	0.00	2.44**	0.33	0.00	0.00	2.68**	0.33	0.00	0.00	2.74***	0.34	0.00	0.00	2.87**	0.34
Org Tenure (mths)	-0.00	0.00	-1.25	-0.14	-0.00	0.00	-1.39	-0.13	-0.00	0.00	-1.14	-0.12	-0.00	0.00	-0.76	-0.08
Org Type (dum)	-0.11	0.34	-0.34	-0.04	-0.03	0.34	-0.09	-0.01	-0.05	0.34	-0.16	-0.02	0.11	0.35	0.33	0.04
Org Size	-0.00	0.00	-0.95	-0.14	-0.00	0.00	-1.12	-0.13	-0.00	0.00	-1.16	-0.15	-0.00	0.00	-1.13	-0.10
Moral obligation (MO)					-0.30	0.10	-2.87***	-0.36	-0.29	0.11	-2.70***	-0.34	-0.25	0.11	-2.28**	-0.30
Enabling conditions (EC)					-0.03	0.18	-0.17	-0.02	-0.12	0.17	-0.69	-0.09	0.06	0.20	0.29	0.04
Org resp. (OR)					0.17	0.51	0.32	0.04	0.26	0.50	0.52	0.07	0.29	0.44	0.65	0.07
MO x EC									-0.64	0.66	-0.98	-0.15	0.32	0.67	0.48	0.08
MO x OR									0.17	0.44	0.38	0.05	0.31	0.40	0.77	0.10
EC x OR									0.01	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.00
MO x EC x OR													1.11	0.55	2.00**	0.33
R ²	0.10				0.24				0.26				0.31			
ΔR^2					0.14				0.02				0.06			
F	2.80**				5.98****				4.09****				3.80***			
df	4.59				7.55				9.53				10.52			
ΔF					3.33**				0.67				4.28**			
Δdf					3.53				2.53				1.52			

8.2. Practical implications

Our studies have implications for practice. A major practical implication of our findings centers on work practices. The relationship between meaningful work and employee thriving suggests organizations must be benevolent. Benevolent work practices such as the provision of health and safety education during crises, offering flexible work schedules and arrangements, or ensuring transparent and empathetic crisis communication could be adopted by managers. They are characterized by kindness, care, and generosity, and show concern for employees as individuals, which is quite significant in times of crisis such as pandemics. Such acts are likely to be appreciated very much, even if such an organizational response results in other detrimental measures (Papouli, 2023). The benevolent practices enable employee functioning (Vaziri et al., 2020). Another implication centers on the enabling conditions. Although inhibitive conditions are thought to negatively influence employee thriving, there is some evidence from our studies showing that is not always the case. Other factors can compensate for the constraining effects of inhibitive conditions. In Study 3, for example, it was observed that when a sense of meaningful work is at high levels, employee flourishing, as indicated by perceived thriving, is greatest under inhibitive (i.e., low enabling) conditions and low responsiveness.

8.3. Limitations and future research

Consistent with research, our studies have limitations that can be overcome in the future. We conducted multiple studies across time (four time periods) and locations (two different cities) to address the limitations of single studies. Nevertheless, our samples are relatively small. However, they are similar to others in the literature (Nawaz et al., 2020). Under the most extreme conditions, when there were lockdowns, it was not easy to obtain large samples (Probst et al., 2020). Nonetheless, we recommend larger sample sizes in future studies. We also recommend additional experimental studies, particularly naturalistic ones that were not possible in our studies because of extreme conditions (e.g., the pandemic). Further, our data were from employees in one country. However, they are similar to other U.S. studies of extreme conditions (e.g., a pandemic; McFarland et al., 2020; Vaziri et al., 2020). Nevertheless, we recommend cross-cultural studies because this extreme condition was global.

9. Conclusion

In these studies, we examined moral obligation, responsiveness and enabling conditions' influence on employee flourishing (indicated by thriving and dignity) during extreme conditions. We based it on the positive organizational scholarship paradigm that argues for individuals to thrive in organizations. We found both linear and nonlinear effects involving three-way interactions. We provide an answer to the question of how moral obligation influences employee flourishing during extreme conditions, and the findings enrich the fields of vocational behavior and organizational science.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Baniyelme D. Zoogah: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis. **William Y. Degbey:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Felicity Asiedu-Appiah:** Data curation, Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. **Chidiebere Ogbonnaya:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Benjamin Laker:** Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors of this manuscript declare that:

- There are no financial conflicts of interest to disclose, and no funding has been received for this work from any organizations that may have an interest in the research.
- There are no personal relationships or affiliations that could be viewed as influencing the research presented in this manuscript.
- There are no affiliations with any institution, organization, or entity with a financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.
- There are no other conflicts of interest to declare.

The authors confirm that this declaration accurately reflects all potential conflicts of interest related to this submission and understand that failure to disclose relevant information can result in the rejection of the manuscript.

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Appendix 1. Manipulation checks for Study 2 (Kumasi) and Study 4 (Accra).

	Study 2		Study 4	
	M	SD	M	SD
<i>Confidence: $F(1, 63) = 0.79, p < 0.3778$ / $F(1, 61) = 0.06, p < 0.808$</i>				
Low moral obligation	3.42	1.08	3.21	1.08
High moral obligation	3.48	0.93	3.42	0.80
<i>Confidence: $F(1, 63) = 7.16, p < 0.009$ / $F(1, 61) = 13.98, p < 0.0004$</i>				
Inhibitive enabling conditions	3.03	1.11	3.00	0.99
Facilitative enabling conditions	3.89	0.63	3.60	0.82
<i>Goodness: $F(1, 61) = 0.97, p < 0.3286$ / $F(1, 61) = 0.80, p < 0.3753$</i>				
Low moral obligation	4.97	2.13	4.91	2.33
High moral obligation	5.42	1.86	5.43	1.83
<i>Goodness: $F(1, 61) = 42.59, p < 0.00001$ / $F(1, 61) = 50.78, p < 0.00001$</i>				
Inhibitive enabling conditions	3.88	1.96	3.68	2.06
Facilitative enabling conditions	6.55	0.72	6.38	1.15
<i>Moral obligation: $F(1, 63) = 0.91, p < 0.35$ / $F(1, 59) = 1.44, p < 0.235$</i>				
Low moral obligation	4.71	2.2	3.27	1.46
High moral obligation	5.33	1.83	3.59	1.24
<i>Moral obligation: $F(1, 63) = 25.01, p < 0.0001$ / $F(1, 59) = 59.03, p < 0.0001$</i>				
Inhibitive enabling conditions	3.66	1.86	2.68	1.28
Facilitative enabling conditions	6.52	0.78	4.12	1.04
<i>Facilitative conditions: $F(1, 63) = 0.01, p < 0.94$ / $F(1, 61) = 3.3, p < 0.07$</i>				
Low moral obligation	3.06	1.08	3.24	1.35
High moral obligation	3.55	1.03	3.22	1.01
<i>Facilitative conditions: $F(1, 63) = 36.88, p < 0.0001$ / $F(1, 61) = 37.4, p < 0.0001$</i>				
Inhibitive enabling conditions	2.66	1.04	2.48	1.00
Facilitative enabling conditions	3.97	0.60	3.91	0.90
<i>Inhibitive conditions: $F(1, 63) = 2.57, p < 0.12$ / $F(1, 61) = 0.47, p < 0.49$</i>				
Low moral obligation	2.94	1.16	3.16	1.32
High moral obligation	2.74	1.09	2.66	1.18
<i>Inhibitive conditions: $F(1, 63) = 0.50, p < 0.72$ / $F(1, 61) = 0.83, p < 0.37$</i>				
Inhibitive enabling conditions	2.97	1.12	2.97	1.28
Facilitative enabling conditions	2.71	1.13	2.84	1.27

Appendix 2. Equations for Three-way Curvilinear Interactions.

Equation	Effect
$[\text{Meaningful work} = a + b_1(\text{moral obligation}) + b_2(\text{organizational responsiveness}) + b_3(\text{enabling conditions}) + b_4(\text{moral obligation} \times \text{organizational responsiveness}) + b_5(\text{moral obligation} \times \text{enabling conditions}) + b_6(\text{organizational responsiveness} \times \text{enabling conditions}) + b_7(\text{moral obligation} \times \text{organizational responsiveness} \times \text{enabling conditions}) + e].$	If b_7 is significant it suggests 3-way linear and supports Hypothesis 4a
$[\text{Employee thriving} = a + b_1(\text{moral obligation}) + b_2(\text{organizational responsiveness}) + b_3(\text{enabling conditions}) + b_4(\text{moral obligation}^2) + b_5(\text{moral obligation} \times \text{organizational responsiveness}) + b_6(\text{moral obligation} \times \text{enabling conditions}) + b_7(\text{moral obligation}^2 \times \text{organizational responsiveness}) + b_8(\text{moral obligation}^2 \times \text{enabling conditions}) + b_9(\text{organizational responsiveness} \times \text{enabling conditions}) + b_{10}(\text{moral obligation} \times \text{organizational responsiveness} \times \text{enabling conditions}) + b_{11}(\text{moral obligation}^2 \times \text{organizational responsiveness} \times \text{enabling conditions}) + e].$	Curvilinear If b_4 (i.e., squared term of moral obligation) is significant, it confirms a curvilinear relationship between moral obligation and employee thriving. If b_7 is significant it suggests curvilinear moderation of organizational responsiveness. If b_{11} is significant, it indicates a 3-way curvilinear interaction of moral obligation, organizational responsiveness and enabling conditions.
$[\text{Employee thriving} = a + b_1(\text{meaningful work}) + b_2(\text{organizational responsiveness}) + b_3(\text{enabling conditions}) + b_4(\text{meaningful work}^2) + b_5(\text{meaningful work} \times \text{organizational responsiveness}) + b_6(\text{meaningful work} \times \text{enabling conditions}) + e].$	Curvilinear If b_4 (i.e., squared term of meaningful work) is significant, it confirms a curvilinear relationship between meaningful work and employee thriving. If

(continued on next page)

(continued)

Equation	Effect
$b_7(\text{meaningful work}^2 \times \text{organizational responsiveness}) + b_8(\text{meaningful work}^2 + \text{enabling conditions}) + b_9(\text{organizational responsiveness} \times \text{enabling conditions}) + b_{10}(\text{meaningful work} \times \text{organizational responsiveness} + \text{enabling conditions}) + b_{11}(\text{meaningful work}^2 \times \text{organizational responsiveness} \times \text{enabling conditions}) + e].$	b_7 is significant it suggests curvilinear moderation of organizational responsiveness. If b_{11} is significant, it indicates a 3-way curvilinear interaction of meaningful work, organizational responsiveness and enabling conditions.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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