

The truth about thriving gig workers: Why job demands and coping mechanisms are not enough?

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ABSTRACT

Gig workers often face challenging work environments characterized by uncertain and unpredictable incomes, limited project opportunities, and unclear career paths. Despite these challenges, some gig workers succeed in moving from merely surviving to thriving in their work. While existing studies explore their struggles and resilience, the process that enables this transformation still needs to be explored, particularly in the context of Indonesia's rapidly growing digital creative industry. Addressing this gap, this study aims to develop a model for thriving at work among gig workers in Indonesia's digital creative industry. Using a quantitative approach, questionnaires were purposively distributed to 333 gig workers. Data analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) revealed several key findings. Job demands directly influenced coping strategies, and psychological capital directly impacted goal setting. Both psychological capital and goal setting significantly influenced thriving at work, with goal setting mediating the relationship between psychological capital and thriving. However, job demands and coping strategies had no significant impact on thriving at work, nor did coping strategies mediate the relationship between job demands and thriving. These findings highlight that thriving in the gig economy relies more on internal resources like psychological capital and goal-setting skills, rather than external pressures such as job demands or coping mechanisms, emphasizing the need for personal development.

Keywords: Gig Economy; Thriving at Work; Psychological Capital; Goal Setting; Digital Creative Industry

JEL Code:

J24, J81, L86, M54, O33

DOI:

10.31106/jema.v21i2.22690

Article History:

Received 2024-07-28

Reviewed 2024-09-01

Revised 2024-10-21

Accepted 2024-11-23

Licensed:

CC-BY

How to Cite:

Wendra, W., Siregar, D. D., & Abd Samad, K. (2024). The truth about thriving gig workers: Why job demands and coping mechanisms are not enough? *JEMA: Jurnal Ilmiah Bidang Akuntansi dan Manajemen*, 21(2), 227-259. doi: 10.31106/jema.v21i2.22690

Introduction

Indonesia is projected to experience a demographic bonus period from 2030 to 2045, during which the population of productive age (15–64 years) will outnumber the non-productive age population (65 years and above) (Afandi, 2017). This demographic shift presents both an opportunity and a challenge. To capitalize on the demographic bonus, it is essential to ensure the availability of quality employment opportunities and to equip the workforce with appropriate capabilities. Without these measures, the demographic bonus could transform into a demographic burden, potentially leading to socio-economic pressures in the future.

A significant portion of Indonesia's workforce is employed in the informal sector. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency, 59.11% of the productive workforce—approximately 82.67 million people—were working in the informal sector in 2023. In contrast, only 40.89%, or around 57.18 million people, were employed in the formal sector (Siswanto, 2023). Among these informal workers, 46.47 million are freelancers (Murwani, 2023). Freelancers are individuals who work with non-permanent status for more than one employer over a short period, receiving compensation in the form of money or goods, often based on a daily or piece-rate payment system (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). These freelancers are called gig workers—workers contracted and compensated on a short-term basis by organizational or individual clients through external labor markets (Cropanzano et al., 2022).

The creative industry is one of the sectors that attract a large number of gig workers. In Indonesia, this industry employs approximately 303,759 people (Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2022). However, recent media and creative industry research indicates that most gig workers earn IDR 7 million or less per month, while their reproductive needs exceed IDR 13 million per month (Wilujeng et al., 2024). This significant income gap places gig workers under substantial financial strain. Additionally, gig workers face various work-related challenges, including uncertain and unpredictable income, difficulties in securing project opportunities, lack of career clarity, intense competition in the labor market, lack of workplace social security, and societal stigmatization of their work (Liem et al., 2022). These challenges lead to financial instability and create existential uncertainty as gig workers strive to sustain their livelihoods while preserving a sense of professional identity (Petriglieri et al., 2019). Similarly, research by Wendra et al. (2023) highlights that gig workers in Indonesia's

digital creative industry face significant challenges, including viability concerns, identity struggles, and career uncertainty, all of which negatively impact their overall well-being.

Nevertheless, previous studies reveal that some gig workers are able to mitigate factors that negatively impact their well-being and cause dysfunctional stress. They move beyond merely surviving, finding ways to thrive in their work (Ashford et al., 2018). Thriving at work is a psychological state in which individuals experience vitality and learning (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Vitality refers to the positive sensation of abundant energy, representing a sense of aliveness (Nix et al., 1999). On the other hand, learning refers to gaining and effectively utilizing knowledge and skills (Dweck, 1986; Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Together, these two dimensions reflect growth and forward momentum, with thriving achieved when individuals experience enhanced understanding (learning) and a feeling of energy and aliveness (vitality). High levels of these two dimensions are essential for individuals to thrive at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

Thriving at work has significant implications for an individual's health and development (Kleine et al., 2019; Spreitzer et al., 2012). It enables individuals to adapt to career progress (Spreitzer et al., 2005; Spreitzer & Sutcliffe, 2007) and is associated with improved psychological and physical health (Corey, 2002) as well as better-quality connections with others (Spreitzer et al., 2012). Previous research has identified several factors that drive thriving at work, such as workplace relationships (Conway & Foskey, 2015; Dimitrova, 2020; Elahi et al., 2020; Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2017; Sim et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2018; Zhai et al., 2020), leadership (Chang et al., 2020; Hildenbrand et al., 2018; Li et al., 2016; Shahid et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2017; Zeng et al., 2020), and organizational practices and policies (Jiang et al., 2019; Kim & Beehr, 2020; Silén et al., 2019; Taneva & Arnold, 2018; Yang et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2019). However, the findings from these studies are not fully generalizable to gig workers because traditional psychological theories were developed within the context of a different era (Ashford et al., 2007). These theories fail to capture the modern people use to work nowadays (Ashford et al., 2018).

As described by Chandler Jr. (1969), traditional work environments are characterized by multiple divisions and complex hierarchies. However, these environments are increasingly evolving. More individuals now work in flexible arrangements, such as coworking spaces or virtual settings, with less dependence on fixed physical workspaces. Different from the past, jobs in the modern world of work are less secure, as workers are less reliant on organizations and maintain more transient commitments. Gig workers exemplify this new work setting, as they operate independently and are not formal members of organizations (Ashford et al.,

2018; Goh et al., 2022). Consequently, applying non-organizational work psychology (Shamir, 1992) or an individual-centered organizing framework in the gig economy provides a more accurate lens to understand how gig workers develop thriving at work.

One way to understand how gig workers thrive in their work is through the lens of psychological resource theories (Ashford et al., 2018), particularly the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). This theory helps explain how gig workers respond to the demands of working in the gig economy and identifies the resources they need to succeed. According to JD-R theory, job characteristics can be categorized into two main facets: job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Job demands refer to work's physical, social, or organizational aspects that require sustained physical or mental effort, often leading to specific physiological and psychological costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Although job demands are not inherently negative, excessive demands can cause stress for workers (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). Previous studies have identified several challenges faced by gig workers, including viability challenges, organizational issues, identity struggles, relational difficulties, emotional burdens, and uncertainty about career paths (Ashford et al., 2018; Caza et al., 2021).

In contrast, job resources are work's physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects that help individuals achieve their goals, reduce job demands and associated costs, and foster personal growth, learning, and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Job resources can originate from the organization (e.g., pay, career opportunities, job security), social relationships (e.g., supervisor and coworker support, team climate), job design (e.g., feedback), task characteristics (e.g., skill variety, autonomy, performance feedback), or personal characteristics (e.g., self-efficacy) (Bakker et al., 2007; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). However, since gig workers operate independently and are not part of formal organizations, personal resources are more relevant as a buffer against job demands. Personal resources are attributes linked to resilience and the ability to control and respond effectively to one's environment (Hobfoll et al., 2003). This study employs psychological capital as a critical personal resource, as suggested by Keith, Harms, and Long (2020).

Psychological capital is defined as a positive psychological state characterized by four components: self-efficacy (confidence in one's abilities), hope (developing pathways to achieve goals), optimism (maintaining positive expectations), and resilience (the ability to bounce back from setbacks) (Luthans et al., 2007). In entrepreneurship research, psychological capital has been recognized as a protective factor against stress and a contributor to improved well-being (Baron et al., 2013; Stephan, 2018). Fostering

psychological capital among gig workers could yield similar benefits in the gig economy, helping them manage stress and improve their overall well-being (Keith et al., 2020).

Since gig workers often face precarious job conditions while relying heavily on their personal resources, it is essential to understand how they leverage job demands and psychological capital to thrive at work. This study draws on the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) to explore the connection between job demands and thriving at work and applies goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2013) to examine how psychological capital influences thriving at work. According to the transactional theory of stress and coping, individuals constantly assess stimuli from their environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When these stimuli are perceived as threatening, challenging, or harmful, individuals develop coping strategies to either manage their emotions or address the stressor directly (Biggs et al., 2017). Coping refers to the way people respond to unpleasant emotions (Glanz & Schwartz, 2008) and involves efforts to manage, minimize, or tolerate the demands caused by stressful experiences (Taylor & Stanton, 2007). Coping strategies can be classified into three types problem-focused, emotional-focused (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and passive avoidance or dysfunctional coping strategies (Carver et al., 1989; Cooper et al., 2008; Hertel, Rauschenbach et al., 2015; Litman & Lunsford, 2009). Problem-focused coping strategies are cognitive capabilities (Ashford et al., 2018) to alter the source of the stress (Carver et al., 1989) and consist of activities such as defining a problem, considering alternative solutions, and weighting their relative advantages and disadvantages (Cooper et al., 2008). Emotion-focused strategies are emotional capabilities (Ashford et al., 2018) that aim to reduce the emotional distress associated with certain situations by trying to change one's feelings about them (Cooper et al., 2008). Passive avoidance is passive deals with strain by directing the attention of the individual away from the stressor and the stressful experience by showing disengagement behavior, denial, self-distraction, self-blaming, and substance use and venting (García et al., 2018; Hertel et al., 2015). In contrast, goal-setting theory emphasizes the importance of goal clarity and goal commitment in driving individuals to achieve their objectives (Locke & Latham, 2013). Goal clarity refers to the extent to which goals are specific and well-defined, while goal commitment represents a psychological attachment to achieving those goals. When individuals possess clear goals and a solid commitment to achieving them, they are more likely to pursue their objectives successfully.

The central research question of this study is: To what extent do job demands, psychological capital, coping strategies, and goal setting predict thriving at work among gig workers? The aim of this research is to explore whether and how these factors facilitate gig

workers' ability to thrive. By extending the research on thriving at work to the gig economy context, this study seeks to inspire efforts to better support gig workers in achieving success and well-being in their work.

Literature Review

Job Demands, Coping Strategies, Psychological Capital, and Thriving at Work

The existence of job demands, such as viability, organizational challenge, identity challenge, relational challenge, emotional challenge, and career path uncertainty challenge, might hold back thriving at work. A study by Gkorezis (2016) revealed that conflicting expectations would eliminate empowerment's positive effect on people's exploration and innovative work behavior. Exploration is people's effort to seek out new ways of working through trial and error, agility, finding, and risk-taking (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Also, they argue that when people seek out new ways of working, they will "encounter novel ideas, information, and strategies for doing work." Under highly conflicting orders and expectations, empowerment might distract people and, therefore, impede their levels of exploration and innovative work behavior (Gkorezis, 2016). Additionally, Jiang, Jiang, and Nielsen (2019) found that role ambiguity, defined as a lack of clear information, prevented people from thriving at work. Role ambiguity impedes people from identifying the expectations of their roles, and consequently, people may need clarification about what they should be learning at work. This argument is in line with previous research findings that role stressors can be destructive to thriving (Cullen et al., 2018).

Building on this understanding, the transactional theory of stress and coping offers insights into how individuals respond to such challenges. According to this theory, people develop coping strategies to manage threatening, challenging, or harmful environments (Biggs et al., 2017). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) identified three key processes in coping: primary appraisal, where individuals assess potential threats; secondary appraisal, where they consider possible responses; and coping, which involves taking action to address the threat. For gig workers, who often operate with significant independence, job demands like income instability and existential uncertainty add complexity to their tasks (Caza et al., 2018). While these conditions can offer growth opportunities, they also create risks, including feelings of loneliness due to a lack of organizational support (Lam & Lau, 2012). Importantly, stressors only become threats or challenges when individuals perceive them as such. Once appraised, gig workers determine their responses and implement coping strategies to navigate their work environment. Given the inherently demanding nature of gig work (Ashford et al., 2018; Caza

et al., 2021; Wendra et al., 2023), gig workers are likely to develop and rely heavily on coping strategies. Thus, job demands are expected to positively influence the development of these strategies.

H₁: Job demands significantly and negatively influence thriving at work.

H₂: Job demands significantly and positively influence coping strategies.

On the other hand, the literature on the relationships between coping strategies and thriving at work is relatively scarce. One notable exception is the work of Park (1998), which suggests that people's initial responses to demanding situations are often marked by confusion and distress. However, as stressful situations persist, they can create opportunities for individuals to experience thriving at work by influencing their broader meaning-making systems. When individuals perceive a situation as a threat, they may adjust their global meaning (e.g., adopting a new lifestyle to prevent similar situations in the future) or their situational meaning (e.g., reframing the situation to see potential benefits, thereby reducing its perceived severity). Such adjustments, whether at the situational or global level, can lead to positive outcomes.

Prem et al. (2017) argue that when individuals perceive stressors as challenges rather than threats, they are more likely to experience increased motivation and energy, which fuels their creativity and personal development. This perspective enables them to learn new skills and grow in their roles. Conversely, if individuals view stress as something to be avoided, they may miss opportunities for growth and accomplishment, leading to reduced creativity and a lack of learning at work. For gig workers, avoiding stressful work environments is often not an option due to their pressing life needs. As a result, understanding how they appraise and respond to stressors becomes crucial for fostering their ability to thrive in challenging circumstances.

H₃: Coping strategies significantly and positively influence thriving at work.

Finally, regarding the relationship between psychological capital and thriving at work, Kleine et al. (2019) highlight that individual with strong psychological capital—defined by self-confidence in their job performance (self-efficacy), the ability to redefine pathways to achieve goals (hope), positive expectations for success (optimism), and the capacity to recover from setbacks (resilience)—are more likely to thrive. Those with higher levels of hope and optimism are particularly likely to experience vitality in their work. When confronted with challenges, they demonstrate resilience by bouncing back and learning from difficulties to complete their tasks. Higher psychological capital significantly increases the

likelihood of thriving at work. Supporting this view, Flinchbaugh et al. (2015) found that resilient individuals are capable of thriving even in stressful situations, using personal challenges as opportunities for growth and achievement.

H₄: Psychological capital significantly and positively influences thriving at work.

Psychological Capital and Goal Setting

People will gain greater clarity when they recognize their goals and how their work activities relate to them (Mao et al., 2024). Their hope, expectation, resilience, and optimism will help them develop an awareness of the situation, find information to decide what they need to do, and behavior to develop and set clear goals to achieve. In addition, a previous study has found that individuals with high self-efficacy are more committed to their goals than those with low self-efficacy (Locke & Latham, 1990). People with optimism have a positive viewpoint towards situations that they face. Hope will enable people to see and utilize many alternatives to achieve goals (Shaheen et al., 2024). Other research found that hope and resilience drive people's commitment to perform their tasks (Story et al., 2013).

H₅: Psychological capital has a significant positive influence on goal setting.

Goal Setting and Thriving at Work

Based on goal setting theory, people will focus on achieving their goal whenever there is a clear goal (Locke & Latham, 2013). Previous studies have found that goal clarity reduces uncertainty. Therefore, people will be able to focus on the most important tasks and perform their jobs more effectively (Dahling et al., 2016; Fürstenberg et al., 2021). By having clear goals, people will know what knowledge and skills they need to learn to make progress towards goals (Mao et al., 2024). In addition, whenever people commit to their goal, they will care about it and be responsible for achieving it (Klein et al., 2014). This will energize their motivation and effort to accomplish goals (Locke & Latham, 1990). Previous studies also showed that people with goal commitment will engage in more exploratory activities and care more about individual growth, thus thriving at work (Hu et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2022).

H₆: Goal setting has a significant positive influence on thriving at work.

The Mediation Role of Coping Strategies and Goal Setting

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argue that people always appraise their situation in light of their values, beliefs, and intentions, then consciously or not develop coping responses. Whenever they appraise that situation as stressful, demanding, or challenging, they will

consider how they will respond (Park, 1998). Then they implement their coping strategies against job demands they face. From their experience in appraising job demands, considering responses, and implementing coping strategies, people will have energy and motivation that drive their innovation and sense of development (Prem et al., 2017). People will experience learning and vitality. Thus, this study hypothesizes:

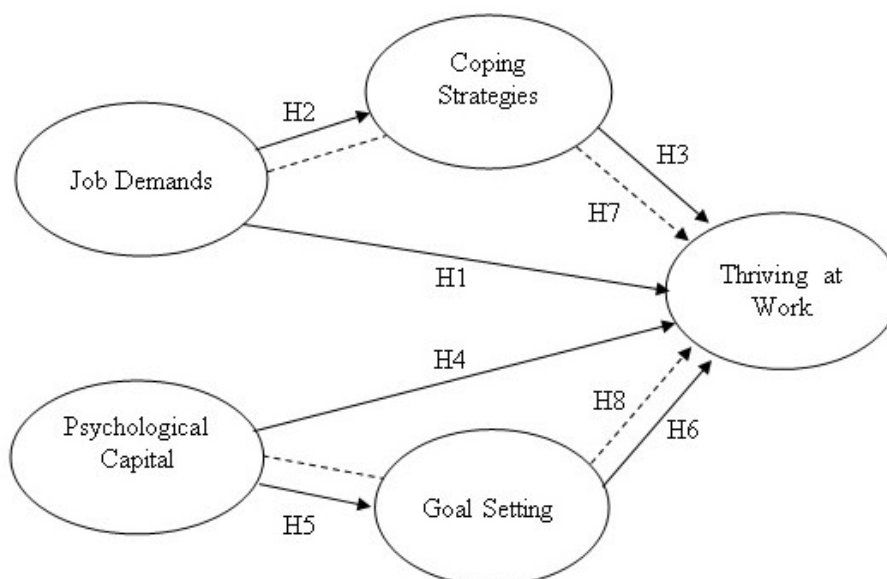
H7: Coping strategies mediate psychological capital influence on thriving at work.

Furthermore, previous studies have demonstrated that self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience significantly contribute to individuals' ability to achieve their goals and perform effectively at work (Locke & Latham, 1990; Shaheen et al., 2024; Story et al., 2013). This indicates that even a single dimension of psychological capital can positively and significantly influence goal achievement. Since thriving at work reflects whether individuals are in a state of growth and development, it is closely tied to their goal-achieving process (Mao et al., 2024). Individuals with a strong learning goal orientation often utilize their knowledge and skills for continuous self-improvement, which enhances their sense of thriving (Son et al., 2022). Supporting this, Kinoshita et al. (2022) conducted a survey of 203 sports science undergraduates in Australia and found a significant positive relationship between thriving and goal progress. These findings suggest that goal-setting theory provides valuable insights into the mechanisms that promote thriving in the workplace.

H8: Goal setting mediates psychological capital influence on thriving at work.

Based on the literature review mentioned before, this study develops a research framework as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Framework



Methods

To achieve the study's objectives, this study employed a quantitative method, which collected primary data through self-administered survey results. In this survey, the data was collected by using closed-ended questions on a 5-point scale designed in the Qualtrics software. While self-administered survey results might introduce some bias, as highlighted by Podsakoff et al. (2003), it was regarded as the most appropriate approach for assessing behavioral and internal variables linked to an individual's internal state. The population of this study was gig workers who worked in creative industries, such as architecture; interior/visual communications/product design; film, animation, and video; photography; music; application and game developers, publishing, advertising, television/radio, performing arts, fine arts, and others, both as main or additional jobs, through online labor markets (OLMs) such as fiverr.com, freelancer.com, upwork.com, sribulancer.com, fastwork.id, and projects.co.id and so on, as well as via social media. Data showed that this group of workers consisted of 303.759 people (Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2022). Because the population was geographically very dispersed, no sampling frame was available, and the costs for compiling a sampling frame would be very expensive (Nazir, 2017), this study employed a purposive sampling technique. At the early stage of data collection, a call for respondent flyers was posted on the researcher's social media to attract respondents who utilize social media. In addition, the questionnaire was also distributed to some digital creative industry communities. The minimum number of samples needed was 170 respondents, calculated using G*Power 3.1.9.6 software. The inferential analysis tool was Structural Equation Modelling-Partial Least Square/SEM-PLS with SmartPLS version 4.1.0.8 software. This analytical tool was chosen because it was prediction-oriented, did not require normally distributed data, and was reliable for processing small and large data.

This study uses several adapted measurement scales to assess the key variables. To measure job demands, a 15-item scale developed by Caza et al. (2021) is used, asking gig workers to rate how well the statements reflect challenges related to viability, identity, emotional well-being, relationships, and career paths. Psychological Capital is measured using a 9-item scale created by Luthans et al. (2007), focusing on self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Coping strategies are assessed with a 28-item scale originally developed by Carver (1997) and later refined by Cooper et al. (2008), Hertel et al. (2015), Litman and Lunsford (2009), and Rice et al. (2014). This scale evaluates three coping types: active problem-focused, active emotion-focused, and passive avoidance. Goal setting is

measured using an 8-item scale from Sawyer (1992) and Klein et al. (2014), which focuses on goal clarity and commitment. Lastly, thriving at work is measured with a 6-item scale by Porath et al. (2012), capturing the dimensions of vitality and learning. Tables 1, 2, and 3 provide detailed information on the measurement items for each construct.

To test the convergent validity of the model, the outer loading values (or factor loadings) were examined. Typically, an indicator meets the requirements for convergent validity if its outer loading is more significant than 0.7. However, indicators with outer loading values between 0.4 and 0.7 are not automatically removed, especially if deleting them would weaken the model's overall validity (Hair et al., 2022). Table 1 presents the factor loadings (FL) for the items used to measure Job Demands and Psychological Capital, providing an overview of their contributions to the respective constructs. Job Demands are divided into five dimensions: Viability Challenge (VC), Identity Challenge (IC), Emotional Challenge (EC), Relational Challenge (RC), and Career Path Challenge (CC). The high factor loadings for most items (generally above 0.7) confirm their vital contribution to the constructs, reflecting their reliability and validity. However, a few items under Relational Challenge—such as "I often feel alone in my work as a gig worker," with a factor loading of 0.554—fall slightly below the ideal threshold. Despite this, the item remains within the acceptable range of 0.4 to 0.7 (Hair et al., 2022) and is retained in the model due to its relevance and importance in capturing the relational challenges faced by gig workers. Removing such items could weaken the overall construct and/or model.

For Psychological Capital, the table highlights its four core dimensions: Self-Efficacy (SE), Hope (HP), Resilience (RS), and Optimism (OP). These dimensions assess positive psychological states that help individuals cope with challenges. For example, self-efficacy items like "I feel confident in my work as a gig worker" have a strong factor loading of 0.905, indicating their importance in this construct. Similarly, hope-related items (e.g., "If I face challenges at work as a gig worker, I can think of many ways to overcome them") and optimism-related items (e.g., "I feel positive about what will happen to me in the future regarding my work") also show high loadings, demonstrating their relevance in assessing psychological capital. Overall, the results confirm the reliability of the measurement items, as the majority exhibit factor loadings above the threshold of 0.7, contributing robustly to their respective dimensions.

Furthermore, Table 2 presents the factor loadings for the items measuring Coping Strategies used by gig workers, categorized into three dimensions namely Active Problem-Focused Coping, Active Emotion-Focused Coping, and Passive Avoidance Coping. Notably,

Table 1. Factor Loadings (FL) of Job Demands and Psychological Capital

Dimensions	Items	FL
Viability Challenge (VC)	I often have yet to determine where my following income will come from.	0.761
	It is difficult for me to plan large expenses because it is not easy to predict the size of my income over time.	0.749
	I often need to find out when I will receive my next income.	0.821
Identity Challenge (IC)	I use different explanations every time someone asks about my work as a gig worker.	0.748
	Sometimes, it is difficult to explain my profession as a gig worker to other people.	0.788
	I need help explaining what my job entails.	0.816
Emotional Challenge (EC)	Life as a gig worker can be very emotionally draining.	0.836
	Working as a gig worker influences emotional ups and downs.	0.853
	In my life as a gig worker, feelings always arise in every activity.	0.766
Relational Challenge (RC)	Gig workers are synonymous with lonely workers because all projects are usually done alone.	0.872
	I often feel alone in my work as a gig worker because I don't have a boss or colleagues who can help me.	0.554
	I would love to be part of a team while doing my job.	0.859
Career Path Challenge (CC)	I am still determining where my future career will lead as a gig worker.	0.893
	I am unclear about where my career will be directed as a gig worker.	0.807
	I don't know what I will do as a gig worker next year.	0.898
Efficacy (EF)	I am confident in my work as a gig worker.	0.905
	I feel confident discussing with other people about my work as a gig worker.	0.828
Hope (HP)	As a gig worker, I can think of many ways to overcome challenges.	0.843
	Currently, I am quite successful in my work as a gig worker.	0.734
	Currently, I achieved the work goals I had set for myself.	0.882
Resilience (RS)	I can work independently.	0.903
	I usually take stressful things calmly to work.	0.794
Optimism (OP)	I always see the positive side of everything related to my work as a gig worker.	0.865
	I am optimistic about what will happen to me in the future regarding work as a gig worker.	0.753

Table 2. Factor Loadings (FL) of Coping Strategies

Dimensions	Items	FL
Active Problem Focused (APV)	I have worked hard to solve challenges in my job as a gig worker.	0.734
	I have acted to fix unpleasant challenges at work as a gig worker.	0.771
	I have tried strategies to solve job challenges as a gig worker.	0.715
	I have thought about steps to solve challenges in my gig work.	0.594
	I have sought advice or help to solve work challenges as a gig worker.	0.678
	I have received help and advice to solve challenges in my gig work.	0.439
Active Emotion Focused (AEF)	I accept that the challenges in my job as a gig worker are real.	0.563
	I am learning to deal with the challenges of my gig work.	0.611
	I get emotional support from others to handle work challenges.	0.605
	I find comfort and understanding from someone to overcome my work challenges.	0.633
	I make jokes about the challenges in my job to cope.	0.630
	I laugh at the challenges in my work to lighten the mood.	0.590
	I see the challenges in my job in a more positive way.	0.498
	I look for something good in the challenges I face at work.	0.669
	I find comfort in religion or spiritual beliefs when facing work challenges.	0.578
	I pray or meditate to deal with challenges in my job.	0.672
Passive Avoidance Coping (PAC)	I keep telling myself that the challenges of gig work are not real.	0.673
	I refuse to believe that the challenges in my job have happened.	0.634
	I switch to other activities to distract myself from job challenges.	0.409
	I do things like watching TV or shopping to avoid thinking about work challenges.	0.834
	I use alcohol or drugs to feel better about job challenges.	0.830
	I use alcohol or drugs to cope with challenges in my gig work.	0.741
	I have given up trying to deal with the challenges of my job.	0.678
	I criticize myself as a gig worker.	0.719
	I blame myself for the challenges I face at work.	0.809
	I talk a lot to let out unpleasant feelings about my job challenges.	0.752
	I express my negative emotions about work challenges.	0.708

reflects different approaches workers adopt to manage challenges in their jobs. The factor loadings, which generally range from 0.4 to 0.8, indicate the degree to which each item contributes to its respective dimension.

Table 3. Factor Loadings (FL) of Goal Setting and Thriving at Work

Dimensions	Items	FL
Goal Clarity (GCL)	I understand what to do in my job as a gig worker.	0.758
	I understand the goals and objectives of my work as a gig worker.	0.836
	I understand how the tasks I carry out relate to my life goals.	0.749
	I understand the expected results of my work as a gig worker.	0.657
	I understand the aspects of my work that will result in positive evaluations from clients.	0.779
Goal	I am committed to my work targets as a gig worker.	0.887
Commitment (GCC)	I care about my work targets as a gig worker.	0.921
	I am dedicated to targets in my work as a gig worker.	0.910
Vitality (VIT)	I feel alive and vibrant.	0.855
	I have energy and passion.	0.843
	I look forward to every new day.	0.713
Learning (LRN)	I learn a lot from my work as a gig worker.	0.907
	I learn more over time as a gig worker.	0.853
	I see myself continuing to develop as a gig worker.	0.862

For Active Problem-Focused Coping (APV), the highest loading item is "I have acted to fix unpleasant challenges at work as a gig worker" (FL = 0.771), highlighting its strong alignment with problem-solving efforts. Other items, such as "I have tried strategies to solve job challenges" (FL = 0.715) and "I have worked hard to solve challenges in my job" (FL = 0.734), also contribute significantly, while lower loading items like "I have received help and advice to solve challenges in my gig work" (FL = 0.439) remain within the acceptable range. Moving to Active Emotion-Focused Coping (AEF), items such as "I find comfort and understanding from someone to overcome my work challenges" (FL = 0.633) and "I accept that the challenges in my job are real" (FL = 0.563) show strong contributions, reflecting how individuals rely on emotional support and acceptance to navigate challenges. Meanwhile, lower-loading items, like "I try to see the challenges in my job in a more positive way" (FL = 0.498), still align conceptually with this coping approach. Lastly, for Passive Avoidance Coping (PAC), the highest loadings are "I do things like watching TV or shopping to avoid thinking about work challenges" (FL = 0.834) and "I use alcohol or drugs to feel better about job challenges" (FL = 0.830), which indicate disengagement strategies commonly used to escape work stress. Additional items, such as "I have given up trying to deal with challenges"

(FL = 0.678) and "I criticize myself as a gig worker" (FL = 0.719), also strongly reflect the avoidance behaviors within this dimension.

Table 3 presents the factor loadings (FL) for the items used to measure Goal Setting, divided into the dimensions of Goal Clarity (GCL) and Goal Commitment (GCC) for goal setting. For Goal Clarity, the highest loading item is "I understand the goals and objectives of my work as a gig worker" (FL = 0.836), indicating its strong contribution to the dimension. While one item, "I understand the expected results of my work as a gig worker" (FL = 0.657), falls slightly below the ideal threshold of 0.7, it remains within the acceptable range (Hair et al., 2022). For Goal Commitment, all items exhibit very high loadings, with "I care about my work targets as a gig worker" (FL = 0.921) being the strongest. Overall, the strong factor loadings across Goal Setting dimensions confirm the validity of the measurement items.

For Thriving at Work, the dimensions are Vitality (VIT) and Learning (LRN). Under Vitality, items such as "I feel alive and vibrant" (FL = 0.855) and "I have energy and passion" (FL = 0.843) show strong contributions, while "I look forward to every new day" (FL = 0.713) also meets the threshold for validity. For Learning, all items show very high loadings, with "I learn a lot from my work as a gig worker" (FL = 0.907) and "I see myself continuing to develop as a gig worker" (FL = 0.862) being particularly strong contributors. The FL values for Thriving at Work exceed the standard threshold of 0.7, confirming that the items effectively capture the constructs of vitality and learning.

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) analysis in Table 4 confirms the discriminant validity of the constructs, with most values meeting the recommended threshold of 0.9 or below (Hair et al., 2022). Among the Job Demands dimensions, relationships such as those between the Viability Challenge (VC) and Identity Challenge (IC) (0.73) and Career Path Challenge (CC) and Relational Challenge (RC) (0.75) fall well below the threshold, indicating clear distinctions. Even the relationship between Emotional Challenge (EC) and Relational Challenge (RC) (0.82) remains within the acceptable range, demonstrating that the dimensions are sufficiently distinct. Moving to Psychological Capital, relationships like Hope (HP) and Resilience (RS) (0.78) and Optimism (OP) and Resilience (RS) (0.84) satisfy the threshold. Although the relationship between Self-Efficacy (EF) and Hope (HP) (0.87) is close to the threshold, it still meets the discriminant validity criteria. For Coping Strategies, most dimensions remain distinct, with values like Active Emotion-Focused Coping (AEF) and Passive Avoidance Coping (PAC) (0.60) well within the limit. The relationship between Active Problem-Focused Coping (APV) and Active Emotion-Focused Coping (AEF) (0.86) also meets the threshold, confirming validity despite the closer relationship.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

	VC	IC	EC	RC	CC	EF	HP	RS	OP	APV	AEF	PAC	GCL	GCC	LRN	VIT
VC																
IC	0.73															
EC	0.51	0.62														
RC	0.58	0.71	0.82													
CC	0.63	0.67	0.68	0.75												
EF	0.19	0.12	0.05	0.22	0.08											
HP	0.11	0.11	0.07	0.22	0.12	0.87										
RS	0.25	0.13	0.05	0.23	0.06	0.66	0.78									
OP	0.25	0.13	0.11	0.31	0.11	0.80	0.84	0.84								
APV	0.35	0.20	0.11	0.23	0.11	0.66	0.74	0.68	0.59							
AEF	0.28	0.26	0.22	0.30	0.11	0.63	0.64	0.59	0.56	0.86						
PAC	0.20	0.27	0.30	0.32	0.25	0.28	0.40	0.24	0.23	0.38	0.60					
GCL	0.30	0.17	0.16	0.29	0.19	0.36	0.29	0.33	0.64	0.35	0.30	0.24				
GCC	0.17	0.11	0.17	0.14	0.16	0.07	0.04	0.03	0.36	0.11	0.18	0.31	0.82			
LRN	0.23	0.10	0.16	0.13	0.20	0.21	0.13	0.1	0.49	0.15	0.20	0.27	0.80	0.86		
VIT	0.13	0.16	0.11	0.25	0.11	0.88	0.81	0.63	0.80	0.65	0.58	0.2	0.41	0.19	0.30	

Table 5. Reliability of the outer model

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Job Demands	0.878	0.898
Psychological Capital	0.868	0.895
Coping Strategies	0.911	0.922
Goal Setting	0.889	0.913
Thriving at Work	0.743	0.823

Finally, Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values were utilized to assess the reliability of the indicators within each variable. This study applied the standard thresholds of 0.6 to 0.9 for both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, as recommended by Hair et al. (2022). The analysis showed that the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for all variables fell within this range, indicating a high level of reliability across all constructs. Table 5 below provides a detailed summary of each variable's Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values.

Result and Discussion

This study successfully attracted 363 gig workers, surpassing the minimum requirement of 170 respondents, though only 333 complete questionnaires were usable after data cleaning. The demographic profiles, detailed in Table 6, reveal a predominantly female group (59%) with most respondents in the productive age range of 25–40 years (60%), followed by those aged 15–24 years (34%) and smaller proportions aged 41–59 years (6%) and under 15 years (1%). Educationally, the majority hold bachelor's degrees (46%), followed by senior high school graduates (41%) and diploma holders (9%), with the rest distributed across other qualifications. Professionally, the largest segment (22%) works in interior design/visual and product communication, followed by roles in film, animation, video, and publishing (15%), music (14%), photography (12%), and application and game development (10%), with other sectors accounting for less than 10% each. Experience levels range widely, with 47% having worked for 1–3 years, 33% for 4–6 years, 12% for over 6 years, and 8% for less than a year, showing a balance of seasoned workers and newcomers. Notably, 59% of respondents have served more than six clients, while 41% have worked with 4–6 clients. The demographic data highlights a predominantly female, productive-age, well-educated workforce, mainly concentrated in interior design and communication roles, with diverse levels of experience and substantial client engagement.

Table 7 presents the path coefficient/original sample (O) value of the variable's relationship. The SEM-PLS model test revealed that the path coefficient of job demands influence on thriving at work was -0.041, job demands influence on coping strategies was 0.257, coping strategies influence on thriving at work was -0.055, psychological capital influence on thriving at work was 0.526, psychological capital influence on goal setting was 0.233, and goal setting influence on thriving at work was 0.611. The result implied that goal setting was the most dominant variable influencing thriving at work because those variables had the largest path coefficient value.

Hypothesis testing was carried out by looking at the P-values. The alternative hypothesis is accepted if the significant level or p-value is <0.05 (Hair et al., 2022). As presented in Table 7, the hypothesis 1 (H_1) test revealed the significant level of job demand influence on thriving at work was 0.317 or higher than the threshold value <0.05 . Thus, job demands had a negative but insignificant influence on thriving at work. The negative influence was presented by a minus sign on the original sample value. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was rejected.

Table 6. Demographic Profile

Profiles		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	136	41%
	Female	197	59%
Age	< 15 years	2	1%
	15-24 years	113	34%
	25-40 years	199	60%
	41-59 years	19	6%
	> 59 years	0	0%
Last Education	Elementary School	2	1%
	Junior High School	9	3%
	Senior High School	135	41%
	Diploma	31	9%
	Bachelor	153	46%
	Master	3	1%
	Doctoral	0	0%
Creative Sector's	Architecture	9	3%
	Interior Design/Visual, Product Communication	73	22%
	Film, Animation, Video	50	15%
	Photography	40	12%
	Music	47	14%
	Application, Game Developer	34	10%
	Publishing	49	15%
	Advertising	25	8%
	TV/Radio	6	2%
Lengths of Work (as a Gig Worker)	<1 year	26	8%
	1-3 years	157	47%
	4-6 years	111	33%
	> 6 years	39	12%
Number of Clients	4-6 clients	137	41%
	> 6 clients	196	59%

The finding indicates that facing an unpleasant work environment will not directly diminish individual's vitality and learning experience at the workplace. The finding supports Spreitzer

et al. (2005) argument that “thriving is not cultivated simply by decreasing stressors.” This statement implies that removing job demands does not automatically make people experience vitality and learning.

For Hypothesis 2 (H₂), the significance level or p-value of job demands influencing coping strategies was 0.001, indicating a positive and significant relationship. This means that job demands have a clear and measurable impact on the coping strategies employed by gig workers. As a result, Hypothesis 2 is accepted. These findings are consistent with previous research on gig workers’ coping mechanisms in other industries, such as the study by Beigi et al. (2022), which examined app-based taxi drivers in Tehran. The study identified six coping strategies—hiding their job, adjusting at work, rationalizing, self-sacrificing, trusting God, and seeking other employment—used to address stressors like financial struggles, reputation damage, mistreatment, personal boundary violations, fear of victimization, and gender role expectations. Similarly, Cameron (2022) found that ride-hailing drivers employed relational and efficiency-focused strategies to manage job demands like financial uncertainty, unpredictable schedules, physical dangers, and limited professional or social development opportunities. Together, these findings highlight the adaptive strategies gig workers use to navigate the complex challenges of their work environments.

Table 7. Direct Effect Result

Hypothesis	Original Sample	Standard Deviation	t-Value	p-Value	Decision
H ₁ : Job Demands -> Thriving at Work	-0.041	0.041	1.000	0.317	Rejected
H ₂ : Job Demands -> Coping Strategies	0.257	0.075	3.444	0.001	Accepted
H ₃ : Coping Strategies -> Thriving at Work	-0.055	0.047	1.161	0.246	Rejected
H ₄ : Psychological Capital -> Thriving at Work	0.526	0.084	6.296	0.000	Accepted
H ₅ : Psychological Capital -> Goal Setting	0.233	0.082	2.845	0.004	Accepted
H ₆ : Goal Setting -> Thriving at Work	0.611	0.050	12.293	0.000	Accepted

Table 8. Indirect Effect Result

Hypothesis	t-Value	p-Value	Decision
H7: Job Demands -> Coping Strategies -> Thriving at Work	1.026	0.305	Rejected
H8: Psychological Capital -> Goal Setting -> Thriving at Work	3.112	0.002	Accepted

The third hypothesis (H₃) testing results show that there is no significant positive influence of coping strategies on thriving at work due to the significant p-value of 0.246. Therefore, the hypothesis that coping strategies have a significant positive effect on thriving at work is rejected. This finding indicates that employing coping strategies does not necessarily make gig workers experience self-development at their work. The explanation for this finding has been proposed by Kleine et al. (2019) that people who experience unpleasant work environments will find ways to cope (Decker & Borgen, 1993). The effort to find coping strategies might consume their energy, thus decreasing their vitality (Latack & Havlovic, 1992)

The test for the fourth hypothesis (H₄) reveals a significant positive influence of psychological capital on thriving at work, with a p-value of 0.000. This confirms the hypothesis that psychological capital positively and significantly impacts thriving at work. The findings suggest that personal resources such as self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism play a key role in fostering self-development, specifically in terms of vitality and learning. This aligns with Sweetman and Luthans' (2010) argument that psychological capital promotes individual growth and advancement, ultimately leading to thriving experiences. Additionally, Paterson et al. (2014), offer an alternative perspective, showing that psychological capital enhances thriving at work through agentic behaviors, such as task focus and heedful relating, further emphasizing its critical role in supporting workplace success.

For Hypothesis 5 (H₅), the significance level or p-value of psychological capital influence on goal setting was 0.004, meaning that psychological capital had a positive significant influence on goal setting. This finding can be explained by the setting theory that people's commitment toward goals is higher whenever they have an internal locus of control and have a high need for achievement (Shaheen et al., 2024). People with high optimism might have an internal locus of control. Thus, they will take responsibility to achieve goals for themselves. Some previous studies have also uncovered the relationship between components of psychological capital and goal setting. For example, individuals with high

self-efficacy have a higher goal commitment than those with low self-efficacy (Locke & Latham, 1990). Snyder (2002), Masten and Reed (2002), and Story et al. (2013) found that hope and resilience drive individual commitment to their tasks.

Lastly, the sixth hypothesis (H_6) test reveals a significant positive influence of goal setting on thriving at work, with a P-value of 0.000. Thus, the hypothesis that goal setting has a significant positive influence on thriving at work is accepted. The finding supports the goal-setting theory, which states that a clear goal can drive goal achievement and success by helping individuals pay attention and perform activities toward the intended goal (Locke & Latham, 2013). People who accept and internalize goals will proceed to achieve them (Snyder, 2002). Acceptance takes place whenever it is clear. Theoretically, people will commit to the goal whenever the goal is specific, challenging, and achievable (Scott & Merton, 2021). Previous studies have also uncovered that goal commitment is related to self-development (Mao et al., 2024). Hu et al. (2018) found that if people think that their career goals are valuable to them, they will be involved in more exploratory activities; people with strong goal commitment tend to feel more independent, pay more attention to personal development, and thus thrive more at the workplace (Liu et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the results in Table 8 present the indirect effects of the hypothesized relationships. For Hypothesis 7 (H_7), which examines the indirect effect of job demands on thriving at work through coping strategies, the t-value is 1.026, and the p-value is 0.305. This hypothesis is rejected since the p-value exceeds the standard significance threshold of 0.05. This finding supports previous studies which state that workplace stressors can arise in various forms, such as job-related factors (e.g., excessive workload) and role-specific challenges within the organization (e.g., ambiguity or conflict) (Cooper, 1983). Employees facing these stressors often experience increased stress levels and actively seek ways to manage them (Decker & Borgen, 1993). People's efforts to find coping strategies to face job stressors will diminish their energy to experience vitality and learning at work (Latack & Havlovic, 1992). Perceived stress tends to hinder employees from gaining new knowledge and skills (LePine et al., 2004), thereby reducing their learning experiences in the workplace.

On the other hand, Hypothesis 8 (H_8) explores the indirect effect of psychological capital on thriving at work through goal setting. With a t-value of 3.112 and a p-value of 0.002, this hypothesis is accepted. These results demonstrate that goal-setting significantly mediates the relationship between psychological capital and thriving at work, highlighting the critical role of goal-setting behaviors in transforming personal resources like self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism into thriving experiences. The finding indicates that people with

high self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism will have high goal commitment whenever the goal is clear, leading to experience thriving at work for both components. This finding supports the propositions of goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990) and provides the mechanism by which psychological capital influences thriving at work.

Conclusion and Suggestion

This study provides important insights into how job demands and psychological capital affect coping strategies, goal setting, and thriving at work for gig workers in Indonesia's digital creative industry. While job demands do not directly influence thriving, they strongly impact the development of coping strategies, though these strategies are not shown to significantly enhance thriving. Psychological capital, however, has a positive and significant effect on both thriving and goal-setting capabilities, with goal-setting playing a key role in mediating the relationship between psychological capital and thriving. Clear goals and strong commitment enable gig workers to experience vitality and learning, which are essential to thriving. The findings emphasize that thriving in the gig economy relies more on internal resources like psychological capital and goal-setting skills than external pressures or coping mechanisms, highlighting the need for personal development to foster growth and success.

Future research should expand its focus beyond gig workers in the digital creative industry to include those in the transportation sector, such as online drivers and food delivery workers. Comparing the challenges faced, internal resources required, coping strategies used, and goal-setting abilities across different industries could offer deeper insights into how to better support gig workers in thriving at their jobs. Additionally, future studies should explore other internal resources, such as autonomy and task variety, as potential factors influencing gig workers' ability to thrive. Given that gig workers operate in flexible environments with diverse tasks driven by client demands, these resources may play a crucial role in their success compared to formal sector or corporate workers. Lastly, future research could also adopt alternative theoretical perspectives, such as self-determination theory, to examine how job demands and internal resources—like psychological capital, autonomy, or task variety—impact thriving at work. Self-determination theory suggests that fulfilling basic psychological needs, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness, fosters growth and development. By addressing these aspects, future studies can build on current findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between psychological capital, internal resources, and thriving at work.

Acknowledgment

This research was funded by the Directorate General of Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia through the Penelitian Dosen Pemula (PDP) research scheme number 105/E5/PG.02.00.PL/2024.

Disclosure The Use of AI Technologies

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Grammarly-AI to translate, paraphrase, and correct the grammar. After using these tools/services, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

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