

The Role of Volunteerism in Enhancing Employee Well-Being within Companies' Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Objective: The study investigates associations between volunteering by employees and pre–post changes in ‘life satisfaction’ and ‘psychological well-being’, and whether job satisfaction and motivation to help moderate these associations.

Method: A quasi-experimental study was conducted with 635 employee volunteers participating in a nationwide volunteering campaign. Pre- and post-intervention surveys were conducted to assess changes in ‘life satisfaction,’ ‘psychological well-being,’ job satisfaction, and motivation to volunteer. Statistical analyses included t-tests, ANOVA, correlation analysis, and cluster analysis.

Results: The results indicate that volunteering increases employees’ ‘life satisfaction’ but may decrease their ‘psychological well-being’, particularly in terms of personal development. Employees with high job satisfaction were more resilient, reporting both higher ‘life satisfaction’ and stable ‘psychological well-being’. Furthermore, altruistic motivation was a protective factor, whereas egocentric motives were associated more weakly with well-being outcomes. Importantly, employees with low job satisfaction were more likely to experience a further decrease in job satisfaction and psychological well-being after volunteering.

Conclusion: This study is one of the first quasi-experimental analyses to document dual-pattern pre–post changes in employee well-being linked to volunteering by employees,

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highlighting their complex, sometimes paradoxical, outcomes. It provides practical guidance for managers, showing that volunteering should be strategically targeted at engaged employees rather than used as a universal remedy for integration or dissatisfaction, thereby providing insights into sustainable human resource management practices in contemporary organizations.

Keywords: psychological well-being, life satisfaction, job satisfaction, volunteerism, employee engagement, sustainable development

Sustainability is central to business strategies, as it integrates economic, social, and environmental considerations for long-term success (United Nations, n.d.).

Employee well-being is increasingly recognized as a fundamental pillar of sustainable development within organizations. Companies that invest in the psychological, physical, and social well-being of their workforce not only fulfil ethical obligations but also build a resilient foundation for long-term organizational success. Such investments contribute to enhanced employee engagement, reduced turnover, and improved organizational reputation, all of which are critical for sustainable business growth (Iqbal & Piwowar-Surlej, 2022; Majini Jes Bella, 2023).

The EU's Directive 2014/95/EU (European Commission, 2023) requires companies to identify and address sustainability impacts through specific actions. One is volunteering, which is required by European Sustainability Reporting Standards (see standards S1 & S3 by European Commission, 2023) to achieve impacts within the workforce and communities. In addition to the undoubted benefits it brings to individuals and communities, volunteering has also become a regulatory requirement.

Companies need to determine whether and under what circumstances engaging employees in volunteering promotes their well-being and enhances job satisfaction.

Volunteering in Organizations and Employee Well-Being

Volunteering plays a significant role in strategies for promoting employee well-being. While it has been present in well-established companies for many years, its importance has grown considerably in response to sustainability trends (Madero-Gómez et al., 2023). There is evidence to indicate that employees who engage in volunteer activities experience a greater sense of purpose and personal growth, which contributes to the establishment of a strong organizational culture and trust within the company (Peloza & Shang, 2011) and ultimately leads to increased work engagement (Im & Chung, 2018; Pfeffer et al., 2022). In the new economic era, with human capital becoming a key strategic resource and corporate governance shifting from “shareholder primacy” to “stakeholderism”, the importance of employees as core enterprise members is increasingly recognized (Zhang et al., 2024).

Many companies regard volunteering as an integral part of sustainable development. From an employee's perspective, volunteering offers an opportunity to experience a deep sense of satisfaction and fulfillment that, for some people, can significantly differ from routine work tasks (Chen et al., 2024). For companies, increased employee engagement leads to improved productivity, reduced turnover, and more cohesive teams, ultimately bringing value to stakeholders (Peloza & Shang, 2011). Volunteering holds promise because it can address various needs of employees, companies, and communities. However, companies should be aware of the complex impact of volunteering on employee well-being when incorporating it into their strategies and management tools.

Studies comparing individuals who volunteer with those who do not volunteer indicate that volunteers are less prone to depression, have higher levels of life satisfaction, and possess greater self-esteem (Nichol et al., 2024). However, it remains unclear whether volunteering enhances well-being or whether individuals who are already more satisfied with life are more inclined to volunteer. A meta-analysis by Jenkinson et al. (2013), which involved experimental studies, did not conclusively demonstrate that volunteering improves well-being. Aknin and Whillans (2021) drew upon the self-determination theory and posited that helping others enhances well-being when it is voluntary and involves direct interaction with individuals in need. In this context, volunteers can derive three significant personal benefits: a sense of autonomy, efficacy, and closeness, which are essential for increased well-being. Available studies even provide examples of volunteering that bring employees satisfaction, happiness, and relaxation (Chen et al., 2024). Therefore, as part of their sustainability strategies, companies are encouraged to engage employees in programs that offer direct assistance to disadvantaged, excluded, and vulnerable individuals. This form of volunteering is socially significant, but it requires greater commitment and can place additional burdens on volunteers.

Volunteering and Motivation

Volunteering is undertaken willingly to benefit individuals or groups without obligation or financial incentive (Hustinx et al., 2010). This definition implies that volunteering is a complex and multifaceted endeavor that encompasses a range of activities across various sectors, organizations, and cultural contexts. Different forms of assistance are associated with varying levels of investment from the volunteer. For instance, monetary donations to charitable collections do not require personal resources and are a low-cost activity. Conversely, direct assistance and support necessitate allocating personal resources and may be influenced by distinct motives governed by different mechanisms.

Motivation and its impact on well-being are also important issues. People volunteer for various reasons, including a desire to help others (altruistic motive), gain new experiences, or solve personal problems (egocentric motives). The motivation to help is considered altruistic when it stems from a genuine concern for others' well-being, prioritizing their needs and welfare over any personal benefit

or reward. Altruistic motivation can increase 'life satisfaction' and fulfillment in the act of helping (Batson et al., 2003). In contrast, the desire to gain new experiences or resolve personal issues stems from the drive to fulfill one's needs, which are considered egocentric motives. Research indicates that altruistic motives are more likely to lead to greater satisfaction and fulfillment in helping, whereas egocentric motives, such as skill development or earning certifications, may not yield personal benefits (Batson et al., 2003; Graziano et al., 2007).

Volunteering and Types of Well-Being

The type of well-being elicited by volunteering is rarely investigated. According to common belief, volunteering enhances happiness, life satisfaction, and overall well-being. However, these concepts represent distinct constructs that reflect various psychological states and are regulated differently.

Drawing upon philosophical traditions, psychology distinguishes between two primary types of well-being. The first is hedonic well-being, akin to life satisfaction, and entails subjective pleasure and satisfaction derived from achieving goals (Diener et al., 2006). Immediate experiences and subjective assessments of life circumstances highly influence this type of well-being. The second type is eudaimonic well-being, which focuses on 'psychological well-being' and attaining happiness through inner growth. This type of well-being is multidimensional and more closely associated with personality traits (Ryff, 1989). 'Psychological well-being' encompasses a sense of autonomy, a sense of purpose in life, the achievement of personal potential, the control of one's life, and the establishment of fulfilling relationships with others. Therefore, it is closely related to the concept of self-actualization. Research studies on volunteering tend to focus more on the hedonic than the eudaimonic concept of 'psychological well-being' (Jenkinson et al., 2013). The former is easier to measure empirically, while the latter offers a more comprehensive understanding of well-being but is more difficult to measure.

Integrating both perspectives can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of volunteers' quality of life. For clarity, the terms 'psychological well-being' and 'life satisfaction' will be presented as distinct and specific categories in quotation marks. In contrast, the general meaning of well-being will be described without quotation marks.

Volunteering and Job Satisfaction

The role of work should also be recognized as a significant factor in helping. Employers often involve their employees in volunteering activities to enhance not only their well-being but also their job satisfaction. This observation is supported by research indicating that volunteers tend to be more engaged in their work, more willing to assist their colleagues, and more positive toward their companies (Rodell, 2013). This suggests that volunteering has a positive impact on job satisfaction, motivation, and overall workplace perception. However, it is worth

noting that the relationship between volunteering and job satisfaction is not one-sided. It is plausible that initial job satisfaction is crucial in deciding to participate and determining volunteering outcomes. For instance, the study conducted by Cho et al. (2020) demonstrates that job satisfaction is a significant mediator between volunteer management practices and the willingness to sustain one's involvement in volunteer work. Nevertheless, further exploration is required to fully understand the significance of job satisfaction in relation to volunteering outcomes, particularly for overall well-being.

The study investigates associations between volunteering by employees and pre–post changes in ‘life satisfaction’ and ‘psychological well-being’, and whether job satisfaction and motivation to help moderate these associations. It aligns with recent trends integrating sustainability and human resource management (HRM). A recent systematic review (Purgal-Popiela, 2025) reports a post-2020 rise in publications and firm-level benefits of HRM for sustainability integration, while highlighting the limited evidence on employee-level well-being and the scarcity of causal (quasi-experimental) designs. Our study addresses this gap by analyzing the volunteering of employees and its effects on ‘life satisfaction’ and ‘psychological well-being’.

Research Questions and Predictions

Organizations that adopt sustainable development often encourage employees to participate in longer-term development initiatives. Limited research exists on the long-term effects of helping behavior on well-being, with the majority focusing on the elderly population (Wheeler et al., 1998). It suggests that volunteering significantly enhances long-term well-being by mitigating symptoms of depression.

Different types of well-being and job satisfaction have rarely been considered in research studies analyzing the relationship between volunteering and well-being. Similarly, experimental models with pre- and post-intervention measurements (involving participation in helping) are rare. Using a quasi-natural pre–post design, the study aims to investigate associations between volunteering by employees (predictor) and pre–post changes in ‘life satisfaction’ and ‘psychological well-being’ (outcomes).

Additionally, the analysis incorporates job satisfaction and motivation to help (moderating variables). The present study examines pre–post changes in two facets of well-being—‘life satisfaction’ and ‘psychological well-being’—following employee volunteering. Based on prior evidence, we state directional predictions for RQ1 and retain RQ2 as exploratory:

RQ1: How does volunteering affect the employees’ ‘life satisfaction’ and ‘psychological well-being’?

RQ2: To what extent do job satisfaction and motivation to help serve a regulatory function to employees’ ‘life satisfaction’ and ‘psychological well-being’ in volunteering activities?

Regarding the first question, the research prediction posits that ‘psychological well-being’ and ‘life satisfaction,’ as correlated constructs (Keyes et al., 2002), will also exhibit a positive correlation in volunteers. Based on previous findings, ‘life satisfaction’ can be expected to increase due to volunteering. However, ‘psychological well-being’ is a multidimensional construct that can be profoundly altered as a result of volunteering. Specifically, in activities that require greater personal involvement, such as interactions with marginalized or disadvantaged groups, volunteers may experience a decline in certain aspects of their well-being, including control over their environment and a limited ability to help, which is consistent with the burnout mechanism (Maddock, 2024).

Due to the exploratory nature of the second research question and the limited availability of data, no prediction was formulated; however, an inductive approach was adopted. As previously noted, research suggests that volunteering can lead to increased job satisfaction. However, the extent to which job satisfaction enhances ‘life satisfaction’ through volunteering remains inadequately investigated. This issue holds significant theoretical implications, as it may demonstrate whether volunteering consistently changes ‘life satisfaction’ or whether its effects vary with the employee’s pre-existing level of job satisfaction. The resulting insights can have practical implications for employers by indicating whether volunteering should be strategically promoted to all employees or explicitly targeted toward committed employees to maximize their well-being and job satisfaction. Companies seeking to enhance their social impact and reputation can effectively promote and support volunteer initiatives among employees by utilizing these insights.

To verify the above predictions, a natural experiment was conducted in Poland from November 15, 2023, to January 10, 2024, to measure the variables before and after the volunteering intervention.

This research is significant in today’s corporate world, as it reveals much about how volunteer efforts can improve workers’ well-being, making them more likely to be engaged and loyal to the company. It identifies motivation and satisfaction in work and provides evidence-based insights for designing effective volunteering programs.

Method

Study Group and Survey Design

The target sample comprised a cohort of volunteers participating in one of the most comprehensive nationwide aid initiatives in Poland, assisting families in need. This volunteering initiative represents a typical long-term aid effort characterized by significant volunteer involvement. Their task (after the training) is to, within two months, select families in need, assess their needs, find donors, collect donations, coordinate transportation, and distribute packages before Christmas. In 2023, a total of 17,000 families received assistance during the campaign. Although the employee-volunteers participated in a voluntary project

by their initiative, companies provided substantial support through various means, including communication (e.g., dissemination of information regarding the needs of the wards), organizational measures (e.g., flexible working hours), and financial assistance (e.g., support for organized aid activities).

The study employed a quasi-natural experimental design (Shadish et al., 2002), as it met several key characteristics of this research method. A distinct intervention was evident: participants' engagement in a volunteer campaign, with variables measured both before and after the campaign. Notably, participants were not randomly assigned to groups; instead, they independently opted to engage in the program and the study, reflecting the natural progression of events. The absence of randomization, a hallmark of natural experiments, indicates that the researcher did not manipulate participation or assign participants to specific research conditions; instead, the researcher observed the effects of the authentic context (Cook & Campbell, 1979). The participant group remained unaltered by the researcher, and participation was entirely voluntary. Although the study does not fulfill two criteria of a traditional experiment—specifically, the absence of a control group and the lack of random assignment to conditions—it is designed to permit classification as a natural field quasi-experiment, thereby facilitating the evaluation of the effects of volunteer participation within genuine organizational settings.

Research data were collected from 23% of the volunteers who participated in the aid campaign. A total of 8.6% ($n = 635$) of volunteers who were employees had completed both pre-test and post-test questionnaires and were included in the study. The participants' demographic characteristics were representative of the overall population of volunteers participating in the campaign in terms of gender (79% female), education (primary – 0.01%, secondary – 37%, tertiary – 63%), and occupational status (employed – 88%, working students – 12%, managers – 19%).

Research Procedure

The volunteers completed four online questionnaires on the Lime Survey platform. The questionnaires were designed to measure 'psychological well-being', 'life satisfaction', job satisfaction, and motivation to help, and to collect demographic data. The participants were provided with a link to the survey platform via email. The survey was conducted twice: as a pre-test before the campaign and a post-test two weeks after the campaign. Personalized survey links were created to combine pre-test and post-test data for each individual. No sensitive information was stored in the database, and the participants were identified using numerical codes.

Variables and Tools

"Job satisfaction" was measured using Zalewska's (2003) five-item *Job Satisfaction Questionnaire* (EFA) and two additional questions on satisfaction with

job achievements and relationships with superiors. The following job satisfaction factors were identified in the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): job appreciation (3 items; $\alpha = .85$) denoting the overall positive assessment of the job and the extent to which it comes close to an ideal job (e.g. "If I had to decide again, I would choose the same job"); achievement satisfaction (2 items; $\alpha = .76$) denoting a positive assessment of work tasks (e.g. "So far, I have succeeded in achieving my goals"), and satisfaction with the work environment and the supervisor (2 items; $\alpha = .77$) (e.g. "I have excellent working conditions" and "I am satisfied with my supervisor"). The overall satisfaction was also analyzed (7 items; $\alpha = .90$).

"Psychological well-being" was assessed using the *Psychological Well-being Scale*, developed by Carol Ryff (1989) and adapted into Polish by Karas and Ciecuch (2017). The original scale incorporates six dimensions of 'psychological well-being' and consists of 84 questions. An 18-item shortened version with three items per subscale was used in this study. It should be noted that the abridged version could have contributed to the lower values of Cronbach's α for each item. The following values were obtained: *Self-Acceptance* – .60, *Life Purpose* – .33, *Mastery* – .64, *Positive Relationships with Others* – .42, *Personal Growth* – .48, *Autonomy* – .34, and general 'psychological well-being' – .74. Despite the limitations of the abridged version of the tool, its validity was confirmed in the study, and the overall reliability was deemed acceptable. However, the results for individual subscales should be interpreted with caution.

"Life satisfaction" was evaluated using the SWLS scale (Diener et al., 1985), which Juczyński (2001) adapted for use in Poland. This scale consists of five statements rated on a seven-point Likert scale. The scale exhibited satisfactory reliability, and Cronbach's α reached .84.

"The motivation to help". There are several scales for studying volunteer motivation (Clary et al., 1998; Furnham, 1995). Most are general-purpose multi-item tools designed for different volunteer populations and types of volunteering. Because the study focused on a multi-week, direct-assistance volunteering format, we used a motivation measure developed by the program's organizing NGO and applied for many years in routine monitoring. In this sample, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), retained 12 items (Appendix 1, p. 143), and derived the motivational dimensions a posteriori from the emergent factor solution.

The participants were asked to rate their level of motivation on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Their overall motivation was assessed with the use of 12 questions ($\alpha = .81$). The EFA revealed three categories of motivation: idealistic-supportive (5 items; $\alpha = .84$), where volunteering is a means of improving the world through helping others (e.g. "I want to do something to make the world a better place"; "I enjoy helping others"); self-reinforcing (3 items; $\alpha = .70$), where volunteering is a way of building personal strength, enhancing own status, and achieving security (e.g. "Thanks to volunteering, I can gain others' sympathy and respect"; "Volunteering helps me deal with my problems"); and exploratory (4 items; $\alpha = .89$), where volunteering creates new opportunities (e.g. "Through volunteering, I can gain new skills that build my life experience"). Idealistic-supportive motives are oriented towards meeting the community's or other people's needs; therefore, they can be classified

as 'altruistic'. In contrast, self-reinforcing and exploratory motives are focused on meeting one's own needs; therefore, they are classified as egocentric. Self-reinforcing motives are oriented toward protective functions, such as achieving security, gaining respect, or resolving personal issues and are classified and named as 'ego-protective'. In contrast, exploratory motives focus on the expressive functions of the ego by providing new experiences and opportunities and are classified and named as 'ego-expressive'. The two categories are interconnected, but they differ in content, which suggests that they may exert a varied impact on the regulation of 'psychological well-being' and 'life satisfaction' throughout volunteering.

The study considered the following demographic variables: age, gender, education, occupational status, job position, material status, helping experience, and place of residence.

Analyses Conducted

Analyses were performed in SPSS 29. After removing outliers, the distributions approximated normality (K-S/Shapiro-Wilk p-values; skewness/kurtosis within ± 1), allowing for the application of parametric tests. The analyses included exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to extract factors. In a variable-centered approach, an dependent t-test is used to identify changes before and after the helping action. In a person-centered approach, k-means cluster analysis is used to identify specific types of volunteers and an ANOVA is used to compare the mean values of the variables across multiple groups. Due to the exploratory nature of the study and its emphasis on differences among the identified groups, regression analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) were not utilized, as these methods are more suitable for testing models under the assumption of directional hypotheses.

Results

How Does Volunteering Affect the Employees' 'Life Satisfaction' and 'Psychological Well-Being'?

This section presents analyses conducted using a variable-centered approach to identify changes in the examined variables before and after the helping action.

Table 1 (p. 130) presents descriptive statistics of the variables studied before and after participation in volunteering.

The results of the Student's t-test for dependent samples revealed that 'life satisfaction' increased significantly within the campaign $t(632) = 2.85$, $p = .002$, 95% *CI* [0.04, 0.19], $d = 0.64$. The effect size indicates a moderate effect. A positive assessment of item-expressed living conditions ("My living conditions are excellent") contributed to the above increase (from $M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.36$ to $M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.38$, $t(632) = 3.54$, $p < .001$, 95% *CI* [0.06, 0.21], $d = 1.18$). A substantial

effect size suggests that volunteering may have a particularly pronounced influence on domains related to comparing one's circumstances with those of the beneficiaries.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the 'Psychological Well-Being' and 'Life Satisfaction' Before (PRE) and After (POST) the Volunteering (N = 636)

Variable	N	M	SD	Min.	Max.
Overall psychological well-being (PRE)	636	4.79	0.48	3.13	5.89
Overall psychological well-being (POST)	636	4.75	0.5	2.75	5.89
Life satisfaction (PRE)	634	4.72	1.02	1.57	7.0
Life satisfaction (POST)	634	4.79	1.02	1.75	7.0

Source: Own elaboration.

In contrast, the Student's t-test for dependent samples revealed a decrease in 'psychological well-being'. The difference in mean scores before and after the campaign was significant, $t(624) = -2.86$, $p = .007$, 95% *CI* [-0.17, -0.02], $d = 0.38$. The small effect size indicates that the decline in 'psychological well-being' was evident, albeit not substantial. Notably, a significant decline in 'psychological well-being' was observed in its Personal Growth factor, understood as the ability to use one's talent and potential, $t(625) = -2.86$, $p = .002$, 95% *CI* [-0.36, -0.19], $d = 0.58$. The moderate effect size indicates that participation in volunteering was associated with a perceived reduction in feelings of personal development. This can be interpreted as a depletion of personal resources resulting from the intensity of involvement in volunteer activities.

Thus, employees who volunteer experience a substantial increase in 'life satisfaction' and a slight decrease in 'psychological well-being'. The boost in 'life satisfaction' stems primarily from a positive assessment of one's living conditions compared with the challenging circumstances of the campaign's beneficiaries. In turn, the decrease in 'psychological well-being' is associated with the development factor related to a sense of resource depletion and lower personal efficacy.

To What Extent Do Job Satisfaction and Motivation to Help Serve a Regulatory Function to Employees' 'Life Satisfaction' and 'Psychological Well-Being' in Volunteering Activities?

In this section, using a person-centred approach, changes in psychological variables associated with volunteering were characterised.

Three job satisfaction factors – overall job appreciation, satisfaction with achievements, and satisfaction with working conditions and the supervisor –

were assessed to determine the extent to which volunteering influences ‘psychological well-being’ and ‘life satisfaction’ in employees with different pre-existing levels of job satisfaction. Three profiles were identified in the k-means cluster analysis (with a minimum distance of 4.51 between the initial cluster centers). The means and standard deviations for each cluster, as well as the results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA), are presented in Table 2. The analysis revealed significant differences between all profiles across all examined dimensions. The profiles representing the final clusters in standardized scores are presented in Figure 1. Due to strong correlations between job satisfaction factors, the profiles were characterized by similar levels of each factor.

Table 2

Specification of Job Satisfaction Profiles – the Results of ANOVA

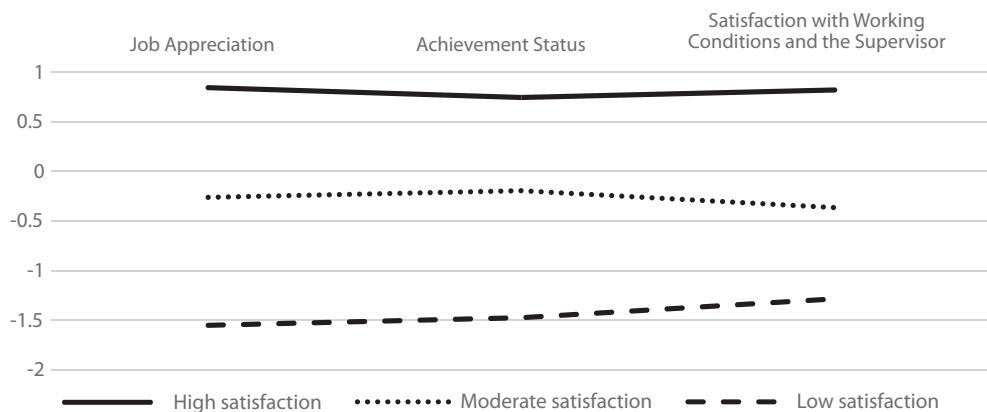
Dimension	Group (a) <i>High satisfaction</i>		Group (b) <i>Moderate satisfaction</i>		Group (c) <i>Low satisfaction</i>		Error	<i>F</i> (2, 635)	<i>p</i>	Eta ²
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Job Appreciation	5.72bc	0.95	4.57ac	1.08	3.21ab	1.35	1.14	217.08	.001	.407
Achievement Satisfaction	5.81bc	0.93	4.99ac	0.98	3.90ab	1.29	1.03	136.38	.001	.301
Satisfaction with Working Conditions and the Supervisor	5.87bc	0.93	4.51ac	1.15	3.56ab	1.30	1.17	202.72	.001	.391

Note: Letters indicate groups that differ significantly at $p < .001$;

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 1

Levels of Job Satisfaction Factors in Volunteer Profiles (standardized data)



Source: Own elaboration.

The volunteers were divided into three groups with: High levels of work satisfaction (39%, with high levels of job appreciation, satisfaction with achievements, and satisfaction with working conditions and the supervisor), moderate levels of work satisfaction (47%, with average levels of all factors), and low levels of work satisfaction (14%, with lowest levels of all factors). The profiles differ in the levels of each factor, rather than in their distribution, and they were identified to explore the connection between job satisfaction and participation in volunteer work.

Three types of analyses were conducted to elucidate the significance of job satisfaction in the context of the changes induced by volunteering. In the first analysis, individuals with various profiles were assessed for differences in subjective 'life satisfaction', 'psychological well-being', and motivation to help before the campaign. This analysis aimed to ascertain whether individuals with diverse job satisfaction profiles differed in the factors contributing to volunteer engagement before the campaign. In the second analysis, 'life satisfaction', 'psychological well-being', and motivation to help were compared before and after the campaign to determine whether and to what extent volunteering affects these aspects. In the third analysis, job satisfaction and its components were compared before and after the campaign in individuals with diverse job satisfaction profiles to determine whether and to what extent volunteering work impacts job satisfaction.

'Life Satisfaction', 'Psychological Well-Being', and Motivation to Help Among Volunteers With Different Levels of Job Satisfaction Before the Campaign

The results of ANOVA (Table 3, p. 133) indicate that participants with the highest level of job satisfaction differ significantly from the remaining groups. These individuals have higher levels of 'psychological well-being' (all factors, except life purpose). The η^2 value indicates a moderate effect, suggesting that job satisfaction accounts for a significant portion of the variance in participants' overall 'psychological well-being'. Notably, self-acceptance emerges as a critical factor, with a very high effect size, indicating that awareness of one's potential and its acceptance is pivotal in enhancing the 'psychological well-being' of this group of volunteers. Regarding the motivation dimension, individuals with high job satisfaction demonstrated significantly higher scores on the altruistic dimension of motivation, although the effect size remains small. In conclusion, individuals with high job satisfaction possess more personal resources that serve as protective factors, enabling them to cope more effectively with the challenges associated with volunteering. These findings underscore that job satisfaction may be a fundamental factor contributing to volunteers' positive experiences and 'psychological well-being'.

Changes in 'Life Satisfaction', 'Psychological Well-Being', and Motivation to Help Volunteers With Different Levels of Job Satisfaction Before the Campaign

The analysis of variance revealed significant differences between individuals with high job satisfaction and the remaining groups in the context of the changes

Table 3

Comparison of the Factors Associated With 'Psychological Well-Being', 'Life Satisfaction', and Motivation in Volunteers With Different Levels of Job Satisfaction Before the Volunteering Campaign – the Results of ANOVA

Dimension	Group (a) <i>High satisfaction</i>		Group (b) <i>Moderate satisfaction</i>		Group (c) <i>Low satisfaction</i>		Error	<i>F</i> (2, 635)	<i>p</i>	Eta ²
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Overall psychological well-being	4.92bc	0.46	4.73ac	0.44	4.51ab	0.47	0.191	32.51	.001	.092
Mastery	5.01bc	0.68	4.83ac	0.65	4.53ab	0.71	0.433	18.24	.001	.055
Self-acceptance	4.84bc	0.74	4.36ac	0.76	3.92ab	0.88	0.562	58.26	.001	.157
Relationships	5.21bc	0.64	4.94a	0.71	4.82a	0.68	0.437	16.66	.001	.050
Growth	5.25c	0.57	5.15c	0.62	4.91ab	0.72	0.364	11.28	.001	.035
Purpose	4.68	0.86	4.68	0.85	4.51	0.87	0.707	1.48	.227	.005
Autonomy	4.59	0.78	4.45	0.76	4.38	0.78	0.691	3.35	.040	.011
Life satisfaction	5.15bc	0.83	4.45ac	1.01	4.10ab	1.02	0.875	61.00	.001	.162
Overall motivation	5.85c	0.60	5.75	0.60	5.66a	0.67	0.370	4.04	.018	.013
Altruistic	6.31c	0.71	6.24	0.60	6.04a	0.87	0.484	5.31	.005	.017
Ego-protective	4.56	1.21	4.44	1.11	4.37	1.25	1.398	1.28	.278	.004
Ego-expressive	6.26	0.70	6.12	0.77	6.16	0.72	0.528	2.74	.065	.009

Note. Letters indicate groups that differ significantly at $p < .01$.

Source: Own elaboration.

experienced during the campaign (Table 4, p. 134 and Figure 2, p. 135). 'Psychological well-being' generally decreased after the campaign, but individuals with high levels of job satisfaction were the only group that did not experience a decline in 'psychological well-being'. The magnitude of the eta² effect is low, suggesting that high job satisfaction is a modest buffer, mitigating the negative impact of intense involvement in the volunteer campaign on 'psychological well-being'.

Differences in life satisfaction were more pronounced among the participants. Volunteers with high job satisfaction reported a significant increase in 'life satisfaction', whereas those in the low satisfaction group experienced a decrease. The magnitude of the eta² effect is moderate, indicating that the level of job satisfaction may be a significant factor influencing positive changes in 'life satisfaction' during the volunteer campaign. The changes in the motivation to

help are equally noteworthy. Overall, job satisfaction was not directly correlated with changes in motivation after the campaign. However, the type of motivation was determined by job satisfaction. The most and least satisfied volunteers experienced a significant increase in altruistic motivation, whereas participants with moderate job satisfaction reported a significant decrease in altruistic motivation. The small effect size indicates that altruistic motivation may exhibit greater flexibility in groups with extreme levels of job satisfaction. In contrast, individuals with moderate satisfaction may be more vulnerable to adverse changes in this context.

In conclusion, high job satisfaction protects 'psychological well-being' and increases 'life satisfaction' during a volunteer campaign. In contrast, those with low job satisfaction are more susceptible to declines in these areas. The results underscore the complexity of changes in altruistic motivation, which varies according to the level of job satisfaction.

Table 4

Comparison of Changes in 'Psychological Well-Being' and the Factors Associated With Volunteers' Different Levels of Job Satisfaction After the Volunteering Campaign – the Results of ANOVA

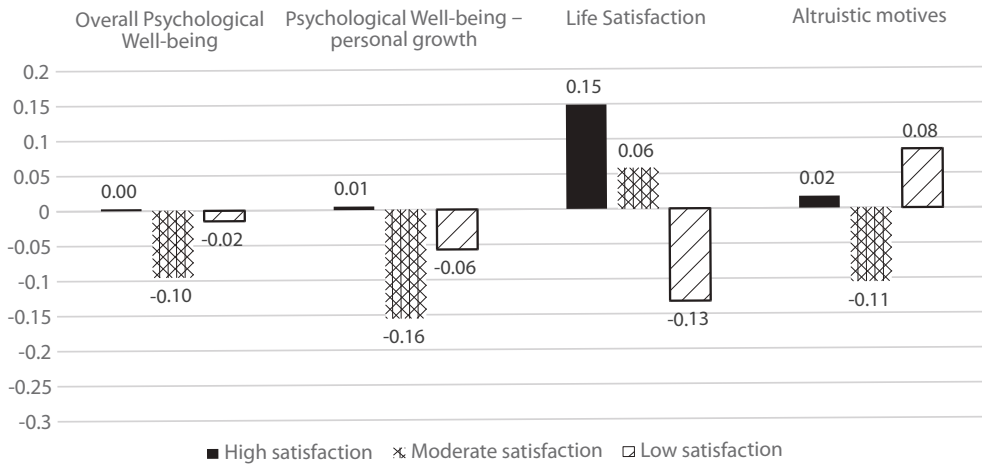
Dimension	Group (a) High satisfaction		Group (b) Moderate satisfaction		Group (c) Low satisfaction		Error	F (2, 635)	p	Eta ²
	M POST/ PRE	SD	M POST/ PRE	SD	M POST/ PRE	SD				
Overall psychological well-being	0.003b	0.41	-0.095a	0.36	-0.015	0.31	0.135	4.733	.009	.015
Mastery	0.030	0.70	-0.094	0.67	-0.064	0.62	0.458	2.379	.093	.008
Self-acceptance	0.021	0.75	-0.024	0.66	-0.133	0.60	0.457	1.710	.182	.005
Relationships	-0.011	0.60	-0.041	0.63	0.039	0.55	0.343	0.627	.535	.002
Growth	0.005bc	0.59	-0.155a	0.57	-0.057a	0.54	0.316	5.124	.006	.016
Purpose	-0.024	0.87	-0.108	0.87	0.074	0.90	0.748	1.589	.205	.005
Autonomy	0.002	0.75	-0.120	0.68	-0.046	0.74	0.495	1.899	.151	.006
Job satisfaction	0.149bc	0.64	-0.058a	0.63	-0.132a	0.64	0.384	6.993	.001	.022
Overall motivation	0.063	0.52	-0.035	0.48	0.001	0.60	0.258	2.418	.090	.008
Altruistic	0.017b	0.64	-0.105a	0.53	0.084b	0.89	0.369	3.736	.025	.012
Ego-protective	0.275	1.08	-0.125	1.01	0.088	1.18	1.156	1.736	.177	.006
Ego-expressive	-0.002	0.72	-0.065	0.67	-0.182	0.64	0.462	2.327	.098	.008

Note. Letters indicate groups that differ significantly at $p < .01$;

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 2

The Direction of Changes in Factors Associated With 'Psychological Well-Being,' 'Life Satisfaction,' and Motivation to Help in Individuals With Different Job Satisfaction Profiles After the Volunteering Campaign



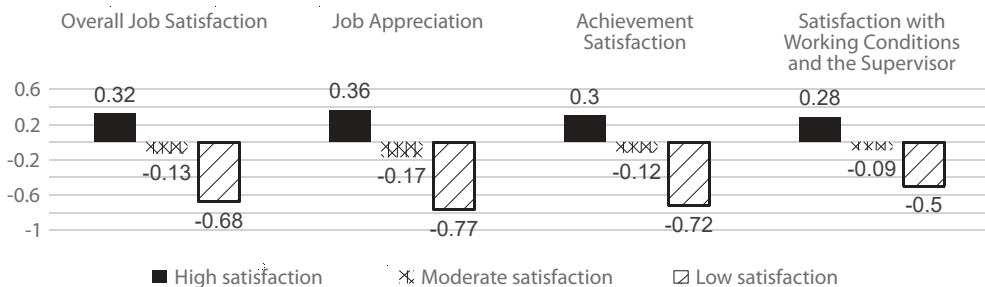
Source: Own elaboration.

Changes in Job Satisfaction in Individuals With Different Job Satisfaction Profiles as a Result the Campaign

The study group consisted mainly of individuals with high (39%) and moderate (47%) levels of job satisfaction. The analysis of variance revealed (Table 5, p. 136) that individuals with high pre-existing levels of satisfaction also reported the most significant increase in overall job satisfaction and the associated factors after the campaign. Participants with moderate pre-existing satisfaction levels experienced a minor decrease in job satisfaction. Individuals with low pre-existing

Figure 3

Significant Changes in Job Satisfaction and the Associated Factors in Individuals With Different Job Satisfaction Profiles After the Volunteering Campaign



Source: Own elaboration.

levels of job satisfaction formed the smallest group (14%), but they reported an even more significant decline in job satisfaction after their volunteering experience. The substantial effect size (η^2) suggests that the initial level of job satisfaction before the campaign had a significant influence on the changes in perceived satisfaction following the campaign. Consequently, individuals with elevated job satisfaction are more receptive to the positive experiences associated with participating in the campaign, enhancing their overall job satisfaction.

Table 5

Comparison of the Level and Type of Changes in Job Satisfaction in Individuals With Different Job Satisfaction Profiles – the Results of ANOVA

Dimension	Group (a) High satisfaction		Group (b) Moderate satisfaction		Group (c) Low satisfaction		Error	<i>F</i> (2, 635)	<i>p</i>	Eta ²
	<i>M</i> POST/ PRE	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> POST/ PRE	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> POST/ PRE	<i>SD</i>				
Overall job satisfaction	0.32bc	0.74	−0.13ac	0.81	−0.68ab	1.06	0.685	57.99	.001	.155
Job Appreciation	0.36bc	0.84	−0.17ac	0.97	−0.77ab	1.24	0.926	55.61	.001	.150
Achievement Satisfaction	0.30bc	0.96	−0.12ac	1.03	−0.72ab	1.26	1.07	37.57	.001	.106
Satisfaction with Working Conditions and the Supervisor	0.28bc	0.91	−0.09ac	1.07	−0.50ab	1.31	1.09	22.53	.001	.067

Note. Letters indicate groups that differ significantly at $p < .05$;
Source: Own elaboration.

Discussion

The inclusion of volunteering in companies’ sustainable development holds significant promise because it enhances the well-being of communities and provides a competitive advantage. Furthermore, volunteering has increased overall ‘psychological well-being’ and ‘job satisfaction’ (Im & Chung, 2018; Pfeffer et al., 2022). However, the results of experimental studies indicate that the relationship between volunteering and well-being is not straightforward (Jenkinson et al., 2013). Therefore, these factors should be examined in comparative analyses to better understand the impact of volunteering on employees’ psychological well-being and job satisfaction.

This study helps address key gaps in the literature by documenting pre–post changes in employee well-being associated with volunteering. Specifically, it investigates two dimensions of well-being among individuals participating in

multi-week outreach activities, considering both their motivations and the interplay between job satisfaction and involvement in volunteer initiatives.

We revealed that volunteering increases 'life satisfaction', but can potentially decrease the employees' 'psychological well-being'. After engaging in volunteering, people tend to evaluate their life circumstances more positively, primarily because they experience positive emotions while helping others and compare their own life circumstances with those of the beneficiaries. However, volunteering, in particular long-term projects, can lead to fatigue and stress and can put a strain on the volunteers' personal resources. This effect was observed among volunteers who helped Ukrainian war refugees. They reported high satisfaction levels but experienced considerable strain and sometimes required psychological support (Chudzicka-Czapala et al., 2023). The present findings support the observation that the decline in volunteers' 'psychological well-being' is associated with a decrease in the Personal Growth factor, which is related to using one's potential, the ability to overcome adversity. In a situation of over-involvement in helping, volunteers may experience depleting their abilities, which causes a decrease in 'psychological well-being'.

The research findings suggest that employees with different levels of job satisfaction derive benefits from volunteering. Specifically, participants with the highest levels of job satisfaction reported an increase in overall 'life satisfaction' after the campaign. In addition, these individuals were the only group who did not report a decrease in 'psychological well-being' after the campaign. The study does not provide a definitive explanation for this change, but certain inferences can be made based on the results. The survey demonstrated that individuals with high pre-existing levels of job satisfaction also experienced greater 'life satisfaction' and 'psychological well-being' before the campaign. The above does not imply a causal relationship between high job satisfaction and increased 'psychological well-being'. However, the study revealed that these aspects are closely linked, showing that individuals with greater 'psychological well-being' and 'life satisfaction' tend to feel more satisfied with their jobs. Furthermore, these individuals tend to be more motivated and are more likely to be driven by altruistic motives. Altruistic motivation appears to be a protective factor that safeguards volunteers against the burdens of helping and enables them to reap greater benefits. Indeed, previous studies suggest that individuals driven by altruistic motives are more persistent in volunteering behaviors and are less likely to give up when faced with challenging circumstances (Graziano et al., 2007). In contrast, individuals who help others mainly to fulfill their own needs, particularly to resolve personal issues, are more inclined to resign. These individuals experience higher stress levels if they cannot resign (for example, if they committed to a project) (Graziano et al., 2007).

Regardless of the underlying mechanism, employees who are satisfied with their working conditions, career trajectory, and organizational leadership derive more benefits from volunteering. They also report improvements in their personal lives. These observations indicate that volunteering is a valuable addition to a well-designed human resource management system and the company's sustainable development strategy. Volunteering not only supports the professional growth of employees but can also enhance their overall well-being.

Two cautions also emerge from the study. Volunteering should not be considered a substitute for effective management tools. Indeed, it was demonstrated that employees with higher levels of job satisfaction tend to attach greater significance to the key aspects of their work after participating in volunteer activities. However, the group is only a portion of the overall employee population. Moreover, the mechanism underlying this positive change remains unknown, but these outcomes align with contemporary trends in human capital management. Contemporary employees expect their employers to share similar social goals and demonstrate genuine concern for their professional development (Deloitte, 2024). Volunteer work should not be used as a tool to integrate teams or resolve team problems, and it should not involve employees who are experiencing a professional crisis or are dissatisfied with their career, workplace, or leadership. In such cases, volunteer work may be counterproductive, leading to reduced ‘psychological well-being’, diminished quality of life, and decreased job satisfaction.

In conclusion, volunteering delivers numerous benefits for local communities and can significantly contribute to developing highly valuable and motivated employees. However, it should be emphasized that volunteering is a demanding social activity that requires effort and may be a source of considerable stress. When organizing volunteer initiatives involving employees, employers should situate such activities within the broader context of the company’s business strategy, which encompasses human resource management processes.

The findings of this study emphasize that well-structured volunteer programs can play a pivotal role in enhancing employee engagement while ensuring alignment between organizational activities, employee profiles, and strategic objectives. However, further research is required to investigate the influence of psychological, organizational, and regulatory factors on the overall effectiveness of such programs. Future studies may offer a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying increased job satisfaction following participation in volunteer activities. Furthermore, we advocate for continued exploration of corporate commitment in fostering volunteerism, particularly concerning managerial practices such as motivation management, team cohesion, and cultivating a sense of belonging.

Limitations

The study had several limitations that could have influenced the generalizability of the results. It was limited to a single volunteering campaign and lacked a nonvolunteer control group. Therefore, conclusions might not apply to other forms of volunteering, especially those involving less direct interaction or shorter commitment periods. The study group was not gender-balanced because most participants were women. However, gender was not correlated with the analyzed variables, so results might not fully capture men’s experiences or motivational dynamics in the context of volunteering. And finally, given the one-group pretest–posttest design without a control group, results should be interpreted as changes following volunteering rather than definitive causal effects.

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Declarations

Declaration of conflict of interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article other than the following one: the corresponding author received payment through the grant to cover the costs associated with the development of the theoretical and methodological framework of the study, as well as the data collection and analysis.

Authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

Authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Entities that contributed to the publication and their contribution

The study was conducted in collaboration with the WIOSNA Association and the Deloitte Foundation. The WIOSNA Association participated in developing the study's concept, provided feedback on the research tools, and was responsible for organizing the data collection process and compiling the study's results. The Deloitte Foundation participated in developing the study's concept, supported its organization, and funded the study.

Ethical Approval

The study received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, with the number 30/2023.

Respondents signed a consent to be contacted to participate in the study when they signed up to volunteer. The survey was conducted online. Responses were recorded under a personalised link, allowing pre- and posttest data of the same person to be combined. No sensitive data were included in the results database. Respondents were coded under the numbers.

Data Availability Statement

The data may be made available to other researchers upon reasonable request addressed directly to the corresponding author.

Financing statement

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Statements and declarations regarding the use of AI

The authors used artificial intelligence-based tools, namely AI Edit GPT and Grammarly, solely for the purpose of linguistic editing, stylistic revision, and improving the text's readability. These tools were not used to generate substantive content, analyze data, or interpret research results. The final content of the paper was reviewed and approved by the authors.

Declaration of authors' contributions to the manuscript

Beata Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz: Conceptualization, Data management, Formal analysis, Research, Methodology, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – first draft, Writing – review and editing

Halina Frańczak: Conceptualization, Fundraising, Project management, Resources, Supervision, Writing – review and editing

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Appendix 1

Scales studying volunteer motivation

Below are statements regarding your opinions and experiences related to volunteering. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement using a 1 to 7 scale.

Nr	Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	I enjoy helping others.							
2	I want to do something to make the world a better place.							
3	I want to feel needed and useful.							
4	Social issues are very important to me.							
5	Cooperation with others is very important to me.							
6	Through volunteering, I can gain new skills that build my professional experience.							
7	Through volunteering, I can gain new skills that build my life experience.							
8	Volunteering gives me the opportunity to build relationships with others.							
9	Thanks to volunteering, I can spend my time in an interesting way.							
10	If I help others, others will help me.							
11	Volunteering helps me deal with my own problems.							
12	Thanks to volunteering, I can gain others' sympathy and respect.							