

NEGOTIATING WORK HAPPINESS UNDER EMOTIONAL DEMANDS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY IN A SOCIAL FOUNDATION

NEGOSIASI KEBAHAGIAAN KERJA DI BAWAH TUNTUTAN EMOSIONAL: STUDI FENOMENOLOGI PADA YAYASAN SOSIAL

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ABSTRACT

Work happiness has become a central issue in organisational psychology, particularly in mission-driven settings where employees are expected to sustain commitment under emotional and resource constraints. This study explores how employees of a social foundation in Karangasem, Bali, experience and negotiate work happiness in everyday organisational life. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study applied Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to in-depth semi-structured interviews with two employees directly involved in community service. Work happiness was understood as a broad subjective experience of work as meaningful, positive, and worth sustaining, while job satisfaction, work engagement, and affective organisational commitment were treated as related but analytically distinct constructs. The findings revealed four interrelated themes: meaning of work, social relationships, emotional burden, and workplace dynamics. Participants experienced happiness through meaningful contribution, alignment between personal values and the foundation's social mission, and supportive interpersonal relationships. However, this happiness coexisted with emotional fatigue, unclear procedures, uneven task distribution, and shifting organisational demands. The study contributes to psychological discussions on employee well-being by showing that work happiness in nonprofit settings is not the absence of strain, but a negotiated experience sustained through meaning, relational support, emotional regulation, and organisational adaptation.

Keywords: Work happiness, social foundation, nonprofit organisation, emotional burden, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

ABSTRAK

Kebahagiaan kerja telah menjadi isu sentral dalam psikologi organisasi, terutama dalam lingkungan yang berorientasi pada misi di mana karyawan diharapkan dapat mempertahankan komitmen di tengah keterbatasan emosional dan sumber daya. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana karyawan sebuah yayasan sosial di Karangasem, Bali, mengalami dan menavigasi kebahagiaan kerja dalam kehidupan organisasi sehari-hari. Dengan menggunakan desain fenomenologis kualitatif, penelitian ini menerapkan Analisis Fenomenologis Interpretatif (IPA) pada wawancara semi-terstruktur mendalam dengan dua karyawan yang terlibat langsung dalam pelayanan masyarakat. Kebahagiaan kerja dipahami sebagai pengalaman subjektif yang luas

tentang pekerjaan sebagai sesuatu yang bermakna, positif, dan layak dipertahankan, sementara kepuasan kerja, keterlibatan kerja, dan komitmen organisasional afektif diperlakukan sebagai konstruksi yang terkait namun secara analitis terpisah. Temuan penelitian mengungkap empat tema yang saling terkait: makna kerja, hubungan sosial, beban emosional, dan dinamika tempat kerja. Para peserta merasakan kebahagiaan melalui kontribusi yang bermakna, keselarasan antara nilai-nilai pribadi dan misi sosial yayasan, serta hubungan interpersonal yang mendukung. Namun, kebahagiaan ini berdampingan dengan kelelahan emosional, prosedur yang tidak jelas, distribusi tugas yang tidak merata, dan tuntutan organisasi yang terus berubah. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada diskusi psikologis mengenai kesejahteraan karyawan dengan menunjukkan bahwa kebahagiaan kerja di lingkungan nirlaba bukanlah ketiadaan tekanan, melainkan pengalaman yang dinegosiasikan dan dipertahankan melalui makna, dukungan relasional, regulasi emosi, dan adaptasi organisasi.

Kata Kunci: *kebahagiaan kerja, yayasan sosial, organisasi nirlaba, beban emosional, analisis fenomenologi interpretatif*

INTRODUCTION

Across contemporary organisations, sustaining employee well-being has become a central psychological and managerial challenge. Work happiness has therefore gained increasing scholarly attention because it is associated with healthier functioning, stronger motivation, higher performance, and more sustainable forms of organisational involvement (Fisher, 2010). Individuals who experience their work as meaningful and psychologically rewarding are more likely to remain engaged, contribute positively to organisational life, and maintain adaptive functioning over time. Recent evidence has also reinforced the strategic relevance of workplace happiness by showing its links with creativity, innovation, and positive organisational outcomes across different employment contexts (Martínez-Arvizu et al., 2025). These issues become particularly salient in nonprofit and social-service organisations, where employees often work with limited material resources while carrying strong moral, relational, and prosocial responsibilities (Binder, 2016; Huang, 2023).

Despite its growing popularity, the concept of work happiness still requires conceptual clarity. In the present study, work happiness is defined as a subjective experience in which work is perceived as positive, meaningful, and worth sustaining over time. Although related to job satisfaction, work engagement, and affective organisational commitment, work happiness is not reducible to any of these constructs. Job satisfaction generally refers to evaluative feelings toward one's job and working conditions, work

engagement concerns energy, dedication, and psychological investment in work activities, whereas affective organisational commitment reflects emotional attachment to the organisation and the desire to remain part of it (Elayan et al., 2023; Fisher, 2010; Tugade & Arcinas, 2023). Maintaining these distinctions allows for a more comprehensive understanding of employees' lived experiences and is consistent with recent perspectives that conceptualise workplace happiness as a multidimensional phenomenon rather than a single organisational outcome (Al-Shams Abdul Wahid et al., 2024; Kustiawan et al., 2022; Salazar-Altamirano et al., 2026).

This conceptual distinction becomes especially important in the context of social foundations. Unlike many profit-oriented workplaces, social foundations are mission-driven organisations in which employees frequently derive meaning from helping others, supporting vulnerable communities, and participating in work aligned with humanitarian values (Benevene et al., 2018; Mousa et al., 2020). Yet these same organisations often operate under structural constraints, including limited resources, emotional overload, role ambiguity, and inconsistent organisational systems (Brunetto et al., 2024; Buonomo et al., 2021; Nguyen & Uong, 2023). Consequently, work happiness in such settings cannot be understood merely as comfort, satisfaction, or the presence of positive emotions. Rather, it emerges through the ongoing interaction between values, relationships, emotional pressures, and organisational realities.

Existing research suggests that work happiness is shaped by the interaction between personal, relational, and organisational factors. In nonprofit settings, employees often derive a strong sense of purpose from contributing to socially meaningful goals, which can foster positive psychological experiences and strengthen their sense of connection to their work (Binder, 2016; Huang, 2023). At the same time, these organisations frequently operate under conditions characterised by emotional demands, workload pressures, limited resources, and organisational uncertainty (Brunetto et al., 2024; Carpio & Dela Cruz, 2025; Dharani & April, 2022). Supportive leadership, organisational support, and positive interpersonal relationships may help employees navigate these challenges and sustain their well-being (Elayan et al., 2023; Grey et al., 2020; Uman et al., 2024). Taken together, these findings suggest that work happiness in nonprofit organisations emerges not solely from positive working conditions, but from

the dynamic interaction between meaningful work, social relationships, emotional demands, and organisational realities.

However, an important gap remains in the literature. Existing studies on workplace happiness have predominantly relied on quantitative approaches and have focused on organisational predictors such as job satisfaction, engagement, leadership, organisational support, and burnout (Ali et al., 2022). Recent reviews of the field similarly indicate that workplace well-being research has expanded substantially, yet important experiential, contextual, and cross-cultural dimensions remain underexplored (Salazar-Altamirano et al., 2025). While these studies have identified factors associated with employee well-being, they provide limited insight into how work happiness is experienced, interpreted, and sustained in everyday organisational life. This limitation is particularly evident in nonprofit and social foundation settings, where employees frequently navigate the coexistence of meaningful work, emotional demands, and organisational constraints. Consequently, little is known about how employees make sense of work happiness while managing emotional strain and maintaining commitment to a social mission. Addressing this gap requires an in-depth phenomenological exploration of employees' lived experiences rather than further examination of standardised well-being indicators.

A phenomenological approach is especially valuable for addressing these questions because it enables researchers to examine how individuals interpret, sustain, and negotiate well-being within the realities of their organisational lives. Rather than reducing happiness to numerical indicators, phenomenology seeks to understand how meaning is constructed through experience, relationships, and everyday practice (Albdareen et al., 2024; Mockało & Widerszal-Bazyl, 2021). Such an approach is well suited to mission-driven environments, where psychological experiences are often marked by both fulfilment and strain.

The context of Karangasem, Bali, offers a meaningful setting for this inquiry. Social foundations in this region operate within a socio-cultural environment that values service, community, and relational responsibility, while also facing institutional and resource limitations. Although locally grounded, the relevance of this setting extends beyond its geography. Across many countries, nonprofit and social-service employees encounter similar tensions between meaningful work, emotional labour, and limited

organisational capacity. Examining work happiness in Karangasem therefore contributes to wider international discussions on how employee well-being is sustained in mission-driven organisations operating under constraint.

Against this background, the present study aims to explore the lived experiences of work happiness among employees of a social foundation in Karangasem, Bali. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study investigates how employees experience and negotiate work happiness while navigating the emotional and organisational demands of their work. By focusing on employees' subjective interpretations and everyday experiences, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how work happiness is sustained within mission-driven and resource-constrained organisational settings.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of work happiness among employees of a social foundation in Karangasem, Bali. A phenomenological approach was considered appropriate because the purpose of the study was not to quantify work happiness as a fixed or externally imposed variable, but to understand how participants themselves experienced, interpreted, and attributed meaning to happiness within the realities of everyday work. Phenomenology is particularly suitable when the research interest lies in subjective experience, meaning-making, and the way individuals make sense of psychologically significant phenomena in their lifeworld (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Smith et al., 2009).

In the present article, work happiness is treated as a broad subjective experience of work as meaningful, positive, and worth sustaining. Job satisfaction, work engagement, and affective organisational commitment were therefore used as related interpretive lenses rather than as interchangeable constructs or predefined variables. This design choice is consistent with the conceptual aim of examining how happiness is lived and negotiated rather than merely inferred through standardised indicators (Fisher, 2010).

The study was guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is an idiographic qualitative methodology concerned with how individuals make sense of major experiences in their personal and social worlds. It combines phenomenological attention to lived experience with an interpretative commitment to understanding how

meaning is constructed through reflection and language (Smith et al., 2009). IPA was especially appropriate for the present study because work happiness in mission-driven organisations is unlikely to be experienced as a simple or uniform state; rather, it is shaped through personal values, emotional demands, workplace relationships, and organisational realities.

The use of IPA also recognises the double hermeneutic inherent in qualitative inquiry: participants seek to make sense of their own experiences, while the researcher seeks to make sense of the participants' sense-making. This interpretative stance is particularly valuable when examining psychologically complex experiences such as happiness under conditions of strain, ambiguity, and prosocial commitment.

The participants consisted of two full-time female employees working in the same social foundation and directly involved in community service activities. Participant 1 (WY) was a 27-year-old empowerment staff member who had worked at the foundation for approximately three years. Her primary responsibilities involved supporting community empowerment programmes and assisting beneficiaries through various social initiatives. Participant 2 (TV) was a 29-year-old English education teacher who had worked at the foundation for approximately one year. Her main responsibilities included providing English language instruction and supporting educational activities for community members. Both participants were actively engaged in the foundation's mission-driven activities and possessed direct experience of the organisational context under investigation. To protect confidentiality, only participant codes were used throughout the study. Both participants were drawn from the same organisational setting, which provided contextual homogeneity while still allowing experiential variation in role history and daily responsibilities. This form of relatively homogeneous sampling is recommended in IPA because it enables deeper engagement with a shared context before considering points of convergence and divergence across cases (Smith et al., 2009).

Potential participants were identified and recruited directly by the researcher after obtaining permission from the foundation's management to conduct the study. The organisation's leaders were not involved in selecting participants, and no supervisors or managers influenced the recruitment process. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to decline or withdraw from the study at any

time without consequence. The two participants were considered information-rich cases because they had substantial experience working within the foundation and were able to provide detailed reflections on work happiness, emotional demands, and the ways in which these experiences were negotiated in their everyday work. Their continued involvement in the organisation allowed for deeper exploration of the psychological meanings and processes associated with sustaining happiness in a mission-driven work environment.

The use of two participants is methodologically justifiable within IPA, where the emphasis is placed on depth, richness, and idiographic analysis rather than numerical breadth or statistical representativeness. In such designs, smaller samples allow detailed case-by-case interpretation and preserve sensitivity to nuance, contradiction, and personal meaning (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Accordingly, the strength of the present study lies in analytic depth rather than sample size.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviewing was selected because it provides sufficient guidance around the research topic while preserving flexibility for participants to narrate experiences in their own terms and introduce personally salient meanings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The interview guide was informed by the broader concept of work happiness and explored experiences related to meaningful work, feelings towards the job, psychological involvement in daily tasks, relationships with colleagues and supervisors, emotional pressures, coping processes, and attachment to the organisation's mission. Follow-up prompts were used when necessary to deepen reflection, clarify meaning, and explore emotionally significant episodes.

Each participant took part in two semi-structured interviews conducted individually in a private room at the social foundation's office in Karangasem, Bali, ensuring privacy and minimal interruption. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, resulting in around 90 minutes of interview data per participant. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian to facilitate participants' comfort and enable rich descriptions of their experiences. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. To enhance credibility, the completed transcripts were returned to participants for review and confirmation (member

checking), allowing them to verify the accuracy of their accounts and clarify any points if necessary.

The data were analysed using the procedures associated with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Analysis began with repeated reading of each transcript to achieve close familiarity with participants' narratives and experiential accounts. During this process, exploratory notes were developed to capture descriptive observations, linguistic features, emotional expressions, and initial interpretative reflections.

These exploratory notes were then transformed into preliminary codes that reflected psychologically meaningful aspects of participants' experiences. Codes with conceptual similarities were grouped together and examined for patterns and connections within each individual case. Through an iterative process of comparison and interpretation, emergent themes were developed and refined. The analysis remained grounded in participants' accounts, with themes generated inductively from the data rather than predetermined by the interview guide or existing theoretical frameworks.

After completing the idiographic analysis of each participant, themes were compared across cases to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and experiential nuance. This process resulted in the identification of four overarching themes that captured the participants' experiences of work happiness within the organisational context.

The analytic process was conducted primarily by the first author and further refined through discussion and consultation among the author team. Emerging codes, thematic interpretations, and analytic decisions were discussed throughout the research process, helping to strengthen interpretative rigour and reduce the risk of premature or overly individual interpretations.

To enhance credibility, an audit trail was maintained throughout the analytic process, including interview transcripts, coding records, analytic notes, and theme development documents. Reflexivity was also practised continuously, with the researcher critically reflecting on personal assumptions and potential biases regarding work, happiness, and nonprofit organisations to support transparent and grounded interpretation.

This stepwise process preserved the idiographic commitment of IPA while allowing the development of a more integrated psychological understanding of work happiness in the organisational context under study. Throughout the analysis, attention was given to both explicit statements and underlying meanings, recognising that experiences of happiness may be expressed indirectly through narratives of burden, commitment, tension, or purpose (Smith et al., 2009).

Given the interpretative nature of qualitative inquiry, reflexivity was treated as an important component of methodological rigour. The researcher remained attentive to personal assumptions regarding work, happiness, and prosocial organisations, and engaged in continuous reflection during data collection and analysis to minimise premature closure and overly deterministic interpretations.

To enhance trustworthiness, the study followed established qualitative quality principles, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and contextual transparency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was strengthened through repeated engagement with the interview transcripts, close textual analysis, member checking, and the use of verbatim quotations to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts. Following transcription, participants were invited to review and confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts. Dependability was supported through a transparent analytic process and ongoing discussion of coding decisions and emerging themes with the co-author and research supervisor. Confirmability was enhanced through the maintenance of an audit trail, including transcripts, coding records, analytic notes, and theme development documents. Finally, thick contextual description was provided to assist readers in evaluating the transferability of the findings to other mission-driven and nonprofit organisational settings.

The study adhered to general ethical principles for research involving human participants. Formal institutional ethical approval was not required under the applicable university procedures for this type of minimal-risk qualitative study involving voluntary adult participants. However, permission to conduct the study was obtained directly from the foundation's management prior to recruitment and data collection. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained before data collection, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without negative consequences. Confidentiality was protected through the use of anonymised participant codes and the

removal of personally identifying information from transcripts and reporting. Given the small organisational setting and the possibility that participants could be recognised through their roles or personal characteristics, potentially identifying contextual details were minimised or omitted where necessary to further protect anonymity.

Given the exploratory nature of the topic, particular care was taken to conduct interviews respectfully and to avoid unnecessary psychological discomfort when discussing emotionally demanding work experiences. Data were stored securely and used exclusively for academic purposes.

The purpose of this study was interpretative understanding rather than statistical generalisation. Accordingly, the findings should be understood as contextually grounded insights into how work happiness is experienced and sustained within a demanding nonprofit environment. While not intended to represent all social foundations, the study offers theoretically relevant insights into the psychological processes through which meaning, relationships, emotional burden, and workplace dynamics shape work happiness in mission-driven settings.

RESULTS

This study explored how two employees of a social foundation in Karangasem, Bali, experienced and interpreted work happiness within their everyday organisational lives. Although both participants worked in the same institution, they occupied different roles and brought distinct personal histories to their accounts. TV was a younger employee primarily involved in direct field activities with community members, whereas WY had longer organisational tenure and greater involvement in empowerment programmes and the coordination of social initiatives. This combination of shared context and differing responsibilities provided a useful basis for idiographic comparison.

The analysis generated four interrelated themes that illuminate how work happiness was experienced and sustained in this setting: (1) meaning of work, (2) social relationships, (3) emotional burden, and (4) workplace dynamics. These themes should not be understood as isolated categories, but as overlapping dimensions of a broader psychological experience. Participants' narratives suggest that work happiness was shaped not only by internal feelings or individual attitudes, but also by relationships, organisational practices, emotional pressures, and the attached to helping others.

1. Meaning of Work

The first and most prominent theme concerned the meaning participants attached to their work. For both TV and WY, happiness was derived less from formal job conditions and more from the belief that their efforts created tangible value for others. In this context, work was not experienced merely as a set of tasks or administrative obligations, but as an opportunity to contribute, serve, and witness positive change in the community. WY described this sense of meaning in explicitly prosocial terms:

"Because I work at a social foundation, as I mentioned earlier, my desire to make a social impact, especially for children in remote areas, I feel has already reached a point that is more than sufficient to give my work a sense of meaningfulness." (WY_b.106–109)

WY's account suggests that work happiness was closely connected to the perception of creating meaningful social impact. Rather than evaluating work primarily through material rewards or formal organisational conditions, WY derived a sense of fulfilment from contributing to the well-being of children and communities with limited opportunities. The meaningfulness of work appeared to stem from the belief that daily efforts were connected to a broader humanitarian purpose, allowing work to be experienced as valuable and worth sustaining. Similarly, TV linked happiness to emotionally significant moments of visible impact:

"Seeing a child who was on the verge of leaving school being able to continue learning... and hearing them say 'Thank you, brother/sister' deeply touches me. It feels incredibly joyful." (TV_b.126–128)

For TV, the meaning of work was experienced through direct encounters with the outcomes of helping others. Moments of appreciation from beneficiaries carried significant emotional value and reinforced the perception that the work made a tangible difference. Unlike WY, whose account emphasised broader social impact, TV's narrative highlighted the emotional significance of witnessing individual change and receiving direct expressions of gratitude. These experiences appeared to strengthen feelings of joy, purpose, and connection to the work.

Although both participants described work happiness as rooted in meaningful contribution, they appeared to experience this meaning in somewhat different ways. WY emphasised the broader social value of contributing to community development and supporting vulnerable groups, whereas TV highlighted the emotional significance

of witnessing positive change in individual lives. Despite these differences, both accounts suggest that meaning functioned as an important psychological resource through which work was experienced as worthwhile, fulfilling, and worth sustaining. In this sense, work happiness was not primarily derived from external rewards or favourable working conditions, but from the ability to connect everyday work activities with a larger sense of purpose and contribution.

2. Social Relationships

A second theme concerned the relational environment of work. Daily interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and beneficiaries shaped participants' feelings of comfort, belonging, and motivation. Work happiness was therefore not experienced solely as an internal state, but as something co-produced through social connection and the quality of interpersonal relationships. WY described a preference for professional boundaries:

"My relationships with my colleagues... are more professional. They are not friends, but professional workmates. I maintain boundaries." (WY_b.126–129)

WY's account suggests that positive workplace relationships were not necessarily defined by emotional closeness or friendship. Instead, relational well-being appeared to be grounded in professionalism, mutual respect, and the maintenance of clear interpersonal boundaries. For WY, happiness at work was supported by interactions that allowed effective collaboration while preserving a sense of personal and professional autonomy. This indicates that social relationships contributed to work happiness not through intimacy, but through the experience of a respectful and predictable working environment. By contrast, TV emphasised the emotional value of collegial support during difficult moments:

"My relationship with my colleagues is quite good. There was a time when I was overwhelmed, and a colleague willingly took over my tasks. That made me feel that I was not alone." (TV_b.116–118)

In contrast, TV attached greater emotional significance to collegial relationships. The experience of receiving support during periods of pressure appeared to reinforce feelings of belonging and shared responsibility. Rather than viewing workplace relationships primarily through a professional lens, TV described them as an important source of emotional reassurance. The sense of not facing challenges alone contributed to feelings of comfort, security, and work-related happiness.

Although both participants viewed social relationships as important to their work experiences, they appeared to derive relational well-being through different pathways. WY emphasised professionalism, respect, and appropriate boundaries, whereas TV highlighted emotional support, solidarity, and mutual assistance. Despite these differences, both accounts suggest that workplace relationships played a significant role in shaping how work happiness was experienced. Positive relational environments fostered comfort, trust, and motivation, whereas experiences of favouritism, exclusion, or interpersonal tension had the potential to undermine these positive experiences. Social relationships therefore functioned not merely as a contextual feature of work but as an important psychological resource through which happiness was supported and sustained.

3. Emotional Burden

The third theme revealed that work happiness coexisted with emotional burden. Participants did not describe their work as free from stress or frustration. Instead, happiness was experienced alongside fatigue, pressure, disappointment, and the emotional demands of service-oriented work. This finding is important because it challenges simplistic assumptions that happiness at work requires the absence of strain. WY described frustration linked to recognition and fairness:

"There are tasks that receive direct appreciation... but there are also colleagues who take credit for the idea as if it were their own work." (WY_b.141-148)

WY's account suggests that emotional burden was closely tied to experiences of insufficient recognition and perceived unfairness within the workplace. Feelings of disappointment emerged when personal contributions were not fully acknowledged, creating tension between effort and organisational appreciation. However, these experiences did not lead WY to disengage from the work. Instead, WY described continuing to invest in the organisation by refocusing on the foundation's social mission and the positive impact of its programmes on community members. For WY, work happiness appeared to be sustained through an ongoing process of reconciling organisational frustrations with a deeply held commitment to helping others. TV highlighted dissatisfaction arising from generational tensions and resistance to change:

"I work with people who have a fairly significant generational gap... they belong to an outdated generation and are unwilling to update or upgrade... that is what makes me feel dissatisfied." (TV_b.136–139)

WY also recalled exhaustion associated with workload demands:

"There was a time when I returned home at 10 p.m. just to finish a report... it felt extremely exhausting." (WY_b.166–169)

TV described the emotional impact of uneven task allocation:

"Sometimes the distribution of tasks is uneven... which creates a sense of unfairness." (TV_b.150–159)

In contrast, TV's emotional burden was more strongly associated with workplace dynamics, particularly generational differences and perceptions of unequal task distribution. Rather than interpreting these experiences primarily as personal disappointments, TV tended to view them as challenges inherent to working within a diverse organisational environment. Although such situations generated frustration and dissatisfaction, TV continued to derive happiness from the opportunity to serve others and witness the positive outcomes of educational and community-based activities. This suggests that work happiness was maintained through an active process of acceptance, emotional adjustment, and continued commitment to a broader sense of purpose.

Across both accounts, emotional burden did not simply coexist with work happiness but actively shaped how happiness was experienced and maintained. Although WY and TV encountered different sources of strain, both engaged in a process of negotiating happiness by reorienting themselves toward the social value of their work, accepting the emotional demands associated with helping others, and regulating negative emotions that arose from organisational challenges. Work happiness therefore emerged not as the absence of difficulty, but as a dynamic psychological achievement sustained through meaning, commitment, and ongoing adaptation.

4. Workplace Dynamics

The final theme concerned the organisational systems and everyday structures through which work was coordinated. Participants' experiences of happiness were influenced not only by meaning or relationships, but also by how clearly the organisation communicated, managed responsibilities, and enabled initiative.

Workplace dynamics therefore represented the structural dimension of work happiness. WY described barriers to implementing ideas:

"Some of the ideas I want to implement could not be realised due to differences in opinions and rigid ideals that are difficult to overcome." (WY_b.206–209)

WY's account suggests that workplace dynamics influenced work happiness through their impact on personal initiative and perceived effectiveness. Difficulties in implementing ideas appeared to create frustration because they limited the translation of personal commitment into concrete action. For WY, organisational constraints were experienced not merely as procedural obstacles but as barriers to contributing in ways that felt meaningful and aligned with the foundation's mission. TV described confusion created by inconsistent instructions:

"We work based on verbal instructions... sometimes the directives differ from each supervisor, which created confusion." (TV_b.186–198)

For TV, workplace dynamics were experienced primarily through uncertainty and inconsistency in everyday work processes. The reliance on changing verbal instructions appeared to create confusion regarding expectations and responsibilities, increasing the psychological effort required to perform tasks. This suggests that organisational clarity contributed to work happiness not only by facilitating task completion but also by reducing uncertainty and supporting a sense of work stability.

Despite these challenges, neither participant viewed organisational difficulties as sufficient reason to disengage from the foundation. Instead, both described adapting to imperfect systems through reflection, flexibility, and continued commitment to the organisation's broader social purpose. Although workplace ambiguity often generated frustration and additional effort, it also encouraged the development of practical problem-solving skills and resilience. Workplace dynamics therefore influenced work happiness, simultaneously creating strain while shaping the adaptive capacities that enabled participants to continue experiencing their work as meaningful.

The four themes show that work happiness in this setting was neither a simple emotional state nor a direct product of favourable working conditions. Rather, it emerged through the ongoing interaction of meaningful contribution, relational support, emotional strain, and organisational realities. Participants' accounts suggest

that happiness in mission-driven work is sustained not because work is easy, but because it remains meaningful despite difficulty.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that work happiness among employees of a social foundation in Karangasem is best understood as a dynamic and multidimensional psychological experience shaped by the interaction of meaning, relationships, emotional burden, and workplace dynamics. This interpretation is theoretically significant because it moves beyond narrow understandings of workplace happiness as simple job satisfaction, task engagement, or emotional attachment to the organisation in isolation. Although these dimensions remain relevant, the present findings suggest that they are embedded within a broader lived experience characterised by tension, adaptation, and ongoing sense-making (Fisher, 2010). In this respect, work happiness appears less as a static positive state and more as a negotiated condition sustained within demanding organisational realities.

The first major contribution of the study concerns the centrality of meaning. Both participants described happiness primarily through their perceived contribution to others, especially through educational support, community empowerment, and access to health-related assistance. This suggests that, within mission-driven organisations, meaningfulness is not peripheral to work happiness but may constitute its core.

This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that employees in nonprofit settings frequently derive well-being from the intrinsic social value of their work rather than from financial rewards alone (Binder, 2016; Huang, 2023). However, the present study extends this literature by demonstrating how meaning is lived emotionally rather than merely endorsed cognitively. Participants described concrete moments in which visible impact, gratitude from beneficiaries, and perceived social contribution generated joy, pride, and renewed commitment.

This distinction matters because it suggests that meaning in helping professions may function as a psychological anchor under adverse conditions. In other words, employees may remain happy not because their work is easy, but because it continues to feel worthwhile.

A second contribution concerns the role of social relationships. The findings show that work happiness was strengthened when participants experienced collegial support, shared effort, and reassurance during demanding periods. This supports previous research emphasising the importance of trust, belonging, and positive interpersonal climates for employee well-being (Grey et al., 2020; Tastan et al., 2020). At the same time, the present study complicates any overly romanticised view of workplace relationships. Participants also described professional distance, perceived favouritism, and tensions in supervisory interactions. These accounts indicate that relationships were not uniformly beneficial; rather, they formed a relational infrastructure that could either buffer strain or intensify discomfort.

A third and particularly important contribution is the finding that work happiness coexisted with emotional burden. Participants described fatigue, frustration, uneven recognition, unclear expectations, and emotional exhaustion associated with intensive service work. Yet these experiences did not fully erase their sense of happiness. Instead, positive and difficult experiences were woven into the same narrative of work.

This finding is analytically important because it challenges the simplistic assumption that happiness at work is merely the absence of pressure, dissatisfaction, or distress. Rather than existing at opposite ends of a continuum, happiness and strain may coexist within psychologically demanding occupations. This interpretation resonates with prior research on emotional labour, burnout, and helping professions, which has shown that caring work often combines fulfilment with depletion (Buonomo et al., 2021; Sender et al., 2021).

The present study advances this discussion by proposing that, in nonprofit settings, happiness is often sustained through adaptive meaning-making under pressure. Employees may feel tired, frustrated, or overwhelmed while simultaneously feeling proud, useful, and committed. Work happiness is therefore better conceptualised as a negotiated psychological condition than as a pure affective state.

The findings also refine the application of Fisher's (2010) framework. Fisher's (2010) framework conceptualises happiness at work through interrelated dimensions such as job satisfaction, work engagement, and affective organisational commitment. The present study supports the continued relevance of that framework but also demonstrates that these dimensions are lived through concrete organisational experiences rather than

existing as abstract variables. Participants remained psychologically invested in their work and emotionally connected to the organisation's mission despite experiences of dissatisfaction, fatigue, and organisational frustration. These findings suggest that satisfaction, engagement, and commitment may appear as partial expressions within a broader and more fluctuating experience of work happiness.

This interpretation is also consistent with recent efforts to conceptualise workplace happiness as a multidimensional construct requiring more refined theoretical and psychometric treatment (Salazar-Altamirano et al., 2026). By adopting a phenomenological lens, the present study adds experiential depth to this line of inquiry and shows how such dimensions are negotiated in practice.

Another important contribution concerns workplace dynamics as a structural dimension of work happiness. Participants' narratives showed that unclear instructions, changing expectations, uneven task allocation, and rigid organisational patterns directly shaped how work was experienced daily. These findings align with previous studies suggesting that organisational support, procedural fairness, and supervisory clarity are crucial for employee well-being (Elayan et al., 2023; Uman et al., 2024).

However, the present study adds an important nuance: in smaller nonprofit settings, organisational structure is often experienced in highly immediate and personal ways. Where formal systems are underdeveloped or inconsistently applied, ambiguity becomes part of employees' emotional world. This means that work happiness cannot be explained solely through personal values or prosocial motivation. It is also shaped by whether organisational life is coordinated in ways that are clear, fair, and sustainable. Meaningful missions may inspire employees, but weak systems can still erode everyday well-being.

Although the study is situated in Karangasem, Bali, its implications extend beyond a single locality. Across many countries, employees in nonprofit and social-service organisations operate under the simultaneous pressures of moral commitment, limited resources, emotional labour, and organisational fragility. Similar tensions have been documented internationally, where employees derive strong meaning from helping others while remaining vulnerable to stress and burnout (Brunetto et al., 2024; Nguyen & Uong, 2023).

By offering a phenomenological account from an Indonesian context, the study contributes to a more geographically diverse psychology of work and well-being. Much of the literature on workplace happiness has been developed in corporate or Western settings. The present findings therefore help broaden theoretical understanding by showing how happiness is constructed and sustained in a mission-driven organisation embedded in a different cultural and institutional environment.

Taken together, the study offers three main theoretical contributions. First, it reconceptualises work happiness as a negotiated psychological experience rather than a stable positive condition. Second, it demonstrates that happiness and strain are not necessarily opposites but may coexist within the same work experience. Third, it shows that meaningfulness and relationships are necessary but insufficient without supportive organisational structures. These contributions reinforce the view that employee well-being should be studied not only through attitudinal measures, but also through lived experience, context, and interpretative processes. This is particularly relevant for organisations whose legitimacy depends on sustained human commitment under difficult conditions.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that leaders of social foundations should not rely solely on employees' altruism or commitment to mission. Meaningful work should be supported through mission clarity, positive social relationships through psychologically safe environments, emotional burden through supportive supervision and recognition, and workplace dynamics through clear communication and fair task distribution. Meaningful work is valuable, but it does not eliminate the need for sound management practices. Organisations seeking to sustain work happiness in helping professions should therefore invest simultaneously in mission clarity and operational quality. Supporting one without the other is unlikely to be sufficient over time.

Overall, the study suggests that work happiness in this social foundation was sustained through ongoing processes of meaning-making, relational support, and adaptation to organisational challenges. Rather than representing a fixed positive condition, work happiness emerged as a negotiated psychological experience shaped by the interaction between personal values and organisational realities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study set out to explore the lived experiences of work happiness among employees of a social foundation in Karangasem, Bali. By adopting an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach, the study addressed an important gap in the literature: while workplace well-being has frequently been examined through quantitative indicators such as satisfaction, engagement, or burnout, far less attention has been given to how happiness is experienced, interpreted, and sustained in emotionally demanding nonprofit settings. In this sense, the study contributes by bringing the subjective and experiential dimension of work happiness to the foreground.

The findings indicate that work happiness in a mission-driven organisation is neither a simple emotional state nor a direct consequence of favourable working conditions. Rather, it emerges through the continuous interaction of personal meaning, human connection, emotional demands, and organisational realities. This conclusion is important because it challenges reductionist approaches that treat happiness only as an attitudinal score or a by-product of motivation. In helping professions, employees may remain psychologically well not because difficulties disappear, but because their work continues to carry significance despite those difficulties.

A second contribution of the study lies in its contextual relevance. Research on workplace happiness has often been shaped by corporate, private-sector, or Western organisational environments. By focusing on a social foundation in Indonesia, this article broadens the geography of psychological knowledge and demonstrates that meaningful insights into employee well-being can emerge from underrepresented institutional and cultural contexts. The study therefore contributes not only to organisational psychology, but also to the wider cross-cultural development of psychological science.

The findings further suggest that organisations should reconsider how they support employee well-being. Meaningful missions and altruistic values can inspire commitment, but they are not substitutes for sound organisational systems. Even highly motivated employees require clarity, fairness, recognition, and psychologically healthy working relationships. Sustainable work happiness is therefore more likely when prosocial purpose is matched by competent management practice.

From an applied perspective, leaders of social foundations and similar organisations should prioritise four areas: clear communication, equitable task

allocation, recognition of employee contributions, and emotionally supportive supervision. These practices are not merely administrative improvements; they are psychological conditions that help transform commitment into sustainable well-being. Taken together, these findings suggest that work happiness in helping organisations may be understood as an adaptive form of prosocial well-being, sustained through meaning, relational support, and organisational adaptation despite the presence of emotional and structural challenges.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study involved two participants from a single organisation, which limits breadth and precludes statistical generalisation. However, this was consistent with the idiographic logic of IPA, where analytic depth and experiential richness are prioritised over numerical coverage. The findings should therefore be understood as contextually grounded and theoretically suggestive rather than representative of nonprofit organisations more broadly.

Future research could extend these findings by examining how work happiness is negotiated across different nonprofit settings and cultural contexts. Longitudinal and mixed-method approaches may also provide further insight into how meaning, relational support, and organisational conditions contribute to the maintenance of work happiness over time. This study shows that work happiness in nonprofit settings is not the absence of strain, but the presence of meaning strong enough to coexist with it. For organisations that depend on human commitment to serve others, understanding this distinction is not optional; it is essential.

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