



Employee Psychological and Emotional Experiences in a Humanitarian Organization: Insights from Pure Hands Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

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Research Aims: This study aims to explore the psychological and emotional experiences of employees working within a humanitarian organization. Despite increasing attention to employee motivation and well-being in organizational research, limited studies have explored how these psychological dimensions interact within humanitarian organizations, particularly in developing country contexts.

Design/methodology/approach: The study employs a qualitative case study approach conducted at Pure Hands Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five employees and the Chief Executive Officer and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. To strengthen methodological rigor, the study incorporated data source triangulation, peer debriefing, and systematic coding procedures.

Research Findings: The findings reveal three central themes shaping employees' experiences: purpose and meaning in work, emotional fulfilment and belonging, and emotional safety and relational support. These themes show how meaningful work, emotional fulfilment, and psychological safety interact to sustain employee engagement in humanitarian contexts.

Theoretical Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the literature on meaningful work and humanitarian organizations by showing how intrinsic motivation, emotional well-being, and psychological safety interact in a mission-driven setting. By extending existing research beyond profit-oriented contexts, the study provides context-specific and practical insights for designing supportive work environments that enhance employee engagement and sustainability.

Keywords: Meaningful Work, Emotional Well-Being, Humanitarian Organization, Psychological Safety, Employee Engagement

Introduction

Humanitarian organizations operate in environments characterized by complex social challenges, high operational pressure, and strong moral responsibilities toward vulnerable communities. Employees working in these organizations often encounter emotionally demanding situations while attempting to deliver humanitarian assistance and social support. Unlike profit-oriented organizations where financial incentives frequently dominate motivation, humanitarian organizations rely heavily on value-driven engagement and commitment to social missions. The global

humanitarian sector continues to expand in response to increasing crises, requiring organizations to maintain committed and resilient workforces capable of sustaining engagement in demanding conditions (Barnett, 2011; UNOCHA, 2023). At the same time, research on nonprofit and humanitarian organizations suggests that employee motivation in such contexts is often shaped by moral commitment and humanitarian values rather than traditional economic incentives (Banks et al., 2015; Lewis, 2014).

Within organizational behaviour literature, employee motivation and engagement are frequently explained through intrinsic motivational factors, particularly in mission-driven contexts where employees perceive their work as contributing to broader social and humanitarian goals. Previous research has emphasized that meaningful work enhances employee engagement and organizational commitment when individuals perceive their work as contributing positively to society (Grant, 2007; Rosso et al., 2010).

In addition to meaningful work, employees' emotional experiences and psychological well-being play a crucial role in sustaining engagement in demanding work environments. Humanitarian workers often face emotionally challenging situations, including exposure to crises and vulnerable populations, which may create both emotional strain and emotional fulfilment. Previous studies have shown that supportive work environments and emotional resources significantly influence employees' well-being and engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Foo et al., 2023)

Despite increasing attention to meaningful work, emotional well-being, and psychological safety in organizational research, existing studies have predominantly focused on corporate and profit-oriented settings. Limited research has examined how these dimensions interact within humanitarian organizations, particularly in developing country contexts where organizational dynamics may differ significantly. This gap highlights the need for context-specific research that captures the unique psychological and relational dynamics of employees working in mission-driven humanitarian environments.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the psychological and emotional experiences of employees working in a humanitarian organization by examining how meaningful work, emotional fulfilment, and psychological safety interact to shape employee engagement. Specifically, the research investigates how employees at Pure Hands Indonesia interpret the meaning and purpose of their work, how emotional fulfilment and a sense of belonging develop within the organizational environment, and how psychological safety influences employees' engagement and motivation. By examining these dimensions within a humanitarian organizational context, this study seeks to contribute to the literature on meaningful work, employee engagement, and organizational behaviour in mission-driven organizations.



Literature Review

Meaningful Work

Meaningful work has become an important concept in organizational behaviour research. Scholars define meaningful work as the perception that one's work holds significance and contributes to a broader purpose or societal value. Individuals who perceive their work as meaningful often develop stronger psychological attachment to their roles and demonstrate higher levels of engagement and persistence in challenging work environments (Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Recent research further highlights that meaningful work is closely associated with intrinsic motivation, identity construction, and perceived social impact, particularly in mission-driven and nonprofit contexts (Charles-Leija et al., 2023; Khusanova et al., 2021; Popaitoon, 2022). In addition, employees' moral and spiritual values may shape how individuals interpret the significance of their work and their responsibilities toward society (Janssen et al., 2022; Author, 2022; Svendsen & Jønsson, 2022).

Employees in mission-driven organizations frequently perceive their work as contributing to social change, which strengthens their intrinsic motivation and commitment to organizational goals. When employees perceive that their work contributes positively to society, they are more likely to experience a sense of calling and dedication toward their roles (Albrecht et al., 2021; Rosso et al., 2010). Within contemporary organizational research, meaningful work is increasingly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct integrating purpose, value alignment, and perceived social impact, all of which contribute to sustained employee engagement (Khusanova et al., 2021; Popaitoon, 2022; Svendsen & Jønsson, 2022).

In humanitarian organizations, meaningful work often emerges through employees' direct interaction with communities and beneficiaries. Humanitarian workers frequently witness the impact of their work on individuals and communities experiencing crises or hardship, which strengthens their perception that their work serves an important social purpose. Therefore, the perception of meaningful work can serve as a powerful psychological driver that sustains motivation and commitment among employees working in humanitarian organizations. Recent studies in humanitarian and nonprofit contexts further emphasize that employees derive meaning from direct exposure to beneficiaries and perceived social impact, which enhances motivation and organizational commitment under challenging conditions (Charles-Leija et al., 2023; Janssen et al., 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, this study draws on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that intrinsic motivation, psychological needs satisfaction, and value alignment are central to understanding employee engagement. Within this framework, meaningful work functions as a key psychological resource that enhances internal motivation and sustained engagement, particularly in mission-driven organizational contexts (Gagné et al., 2022).



Emotional Fulfilment and Employee Well-Being

Emotional fulfilment represents an important factor influencing employees' motivation and engagement at work. Emotional fulfilment refers to the positive psychological experiences individuals gain from performing work that aligns with their personal values and social goals. When employees feel emotionally satisfied with their work environment, they are more likely to demonstrate enthusiasm, persistence, and dedication to their roles (Diener et al., 2018). Recent studies further indicate that emotional fulfilment is closely linked to affective well-being, intrinsic motivation, and sustained work engagement, particularly in value-driven organizational contexts (Cheng et al., 2022; Simbula et al., 2023). Research on employee engagement suggests that emotional resources such as recognition, support, and positive relationships within the workplace significantly influence employees' psychological well-being and motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Studies in organizational behaviour also highlight that emotional dynamics within the workplace, including emotional labor and affective experiences, can significantly influence employees' engagement and exhaustion levels (Author, 2023).

In humanitarian contexts, emotional fulfilment can arise from the opportunity to contribute to meaningful social outcomes. Employees who observe the positive impact of their work on vulnerable populations often experience a strong sense of emotional reward and satisfaction. However, humanitarian work can also involve exposure to emotionally challenging situations, including humanitarian crises, poverty, and trauma among beneficiaries. Recent research highlights that while such exposure may create emotional strain, supportive organizational environments and access to emotional resources can mitigate burnout and enhance resilience among humanitarian workers (Foo et al., 2023; Sadeghi et al., 2025). At the same time, the emotional satisfaction derived from helping others can offset these challenges and strengthen employees' commitment to their humanitarian roles.

Workplace relationships and supportive organizational cultures also play a critical role in fostering emotional fulfilment among employees. Positive interactions with colleagues and supervisors can enhance employees' sense of belonging and emotional connection with their workplace. Contemporary research emphasizes that belongingness, social support, and relational trust function as key emotional resources that strengthen employee well-being and engagement, particularly in collaborative and mission-driven environments (Cheng et al., 2022; Simbula et al., 2023). In mission-driven organizations, shared humanitarian values among employees may further strengthen interpersonal relationships and contribute to a supportive work environment that sustains emotional well-being.

From a theoretical perspective, emotional fulfilment can be understood within Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a reflection of psychological need satisfaction, particularly relatedness and autonomy, which play a central role in enhancing intrinsic motivation and employee engagement in organizational settings (Gagné et al., 2022).



Psychological Safety in Organizations

Psychological safety has been widely recognized as an essential factor influencing communication, learning behavior, and employee engagement in organizations. Psychological safety refers to a shared belief among employees that the workplace environment allows them to express ideas, ask questions, and admit mistakes without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). Recent research further conceptualizes psychological safety as a critical relational resource that facilitates trust, knowledge sharing, and adaptive performance in complex organizational environments (Albrecht et al., 2023; Elsayed et al., 2023; Zadow et al., 2023). When employees feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to engage in open communication and collaborative problem-solving, which strengthens organizational learning and team performance (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

In addition to promoting communication and collaboration, psychological safety also contributes to employees' ability to manage work-related stress and emotional challenges. Research on organizational psychology suggests that supportive leadership and trust among team members can significantly enhance psychological safety within teams. When employees feel supported by supervisors and colleagues, they are more likely to seek help, share ideas, and participate actively in decision-making processes. Recent studies also indicate that psychologically safe environments enhance employee resilience, reduce emotional exhaustion, and improve overall well-being, particularly in high-demand work settings (Albrecht et al., 2023; Foo et al., 2023). These conditions create a workplace environment where employees feel confident expressing themselves without fear of judgment or punishment. Research examining organizational contexts and employee empowerment also indicates that supportive organizational environments can influence employees' emotional experiences and resilience when facing demanding work conditions (Author & Halim, 2023).

Psychological safety is particularly important in humanitarian organizations where employees often operate under uncertain and emotionally demanding conditions. Humanitarian workers may encounter complex situations that require collaboration, adaptability, and open communication among team members. In such environments, psychological safety helps employees manage stress and maintain confidence when facing operational challenges (Foo et al., 2023). Recent evidence suggests that psychological safety plays a critical role in sustaining engagement and adaptive performance in humanitarian and crisis-response contexts, where uncertainty and emotional demands are high (Foo et al., 2023; Sadeghi et al., 2025). Therefore, fostering psychologically safe work environments can play an important role in sustaining employee motivation and engagement in humanitarian organizations.

From a theoretical perspective, psychological safety can be understood as a relational condition that supports psychological need satisfaction, particularly



relatedness and competence, within the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework. This condition enables employees to engage more openly, contribute ideas, and maintain motivation in demanding organizational environments (Gagné et al., 2022).

Integrating these perspectives, meaningful work, emotional fulfilment, and psychological safety can be understood as complementary psychological and relational dimensions that jointly shape employee engagement in organizational settings. Meaningful work provides a sense of purpose and value alignment, emotional fulfilment reflects employees' affective experiences and well-being, while psychological safety represents the relational condition that enables open communication, trust, and adaptive functioning. Within this integrated framework, these dimensions do not operate in isolation but interact dynamically to sustain motivation, resilience, and long-term engagement, particularly in mission-driven humanitarian contexts where both emotional and operational demands are high. This integrated perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of how psychological and relational factors collectively influence employee engagement beyond traditional organizational settings.

Method

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the psychological and emotional experiences of employees working in a humanitarian organization. Qualitative research is appropriate when the objective is to understand individuals' perceptions, interpretations, and lived experiences within a specific social or organizational context. Such an approach enables researchers to obtain in-depth insights into complex phenomena that may not be adequately captured through quantitative methods (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Cheryl N. Poth, 2018). This design is particularly appropriate for examining how employees interpret purpose, emotional fulfilment, and psychological safety within the context of humanitarian work.

More specifically, this research adopts a case study approach, focusing on Pure Hands Indonesia as the organizational context of the study. Case study research allows the investigation of contemporary organizational phenomena within their real-life settings and is particularly useful when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through this approach, the study seeks to understand how employees experience meaningful work, emotional fulfilment, and psychological safety while working in a humanitarian organization. The single-case design was selected to provide a contextually grounded understanding of employees' lived experiences within a mission-driven organizational setting.



Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of employees working at Pure Hands Indonesia, a humanitarian organization engaged in social assistance and humanitarian development programs. Employees within this organization perform various operational and administrative roles related to the planning, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian initiatives.

This study applies a purposive sampling technique to select participants who possess relevant experience and knowledge related to the research topic. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to intentionally select participants who can provide rich and meaningful information about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants were therefore selected based on their involvement in the organization and their familiarity with the organizational environment and humanitarian activities. Additional selection criteria included full-time employment status, active involvement in organizational operations, and the ability to provide reflective insights into employees' psychological and emotional experiences within the organization.

The final sample consisted of five participants plus the Chief Executive Officer representing different functional roles within the organization. These participants include employees working in finance, administration, human resources, marketing, operations, and organizational leadership. The diversity of roles among participants allowed the study to capture varied perspectives regarding employees' experiences of meaningful work, emotional fulfilment, and psychological safety in the humanitarian workplace. Although the sample size was relatively small, this was considered appropriate for an exploratory qualitative case study because the aim was to obtain depth of insight rather than statistical generalization. The inclusion of participants from different functional and hierarchical positions enhanced the breadth of perspectives captured within the case.

Table 1. Demographic and Professional Characteristics of Participants

Participant	Age	Employment Status	Years of Humanitarian Experience	Current Role in Organization
P1	26	Full-time	2 years	Finance Officer
P2	29	Full-time	2 years	Administrative Officer



Participant	Age	Employment Status	Years of Humanitarian Experience	Current Role in Organization
P3	34	Full-time	3 years	Human Resources
P4	38	Full-time	4 years	Digital Marketing Officer
P5	42	Full-time	5 years	Operations Officer
P6	47	Full-time	More than 5 years	Chief Executive Officer

The inclusion of participants with different professional backgrounds and levels of experience enabled the research to obtain a comprehensive understanding of employees' perspectives regarding their work experiences within the organization.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the selected participants. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to prepare guiding questions while maintaining flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives. This method is widely used in qualitative research because it enables participants to describe their perceptions and experiences in their own words while allowing the researcher to explore specific research themes in greater depth (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The interviews explored several topics related to employees' work experiences, including their perceptions of meaningful work, emotional experiences in the workplace, relationships with colleagues and supervisors, and perceptions of psychological safety within the organization. Interviews were conducted individually to ensure that participants could express their views openly and provide detailed insights regarding their work experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to preserve participants' original wording and contextual nuances. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were informed of the research purpose, the use of pseudonyms, and their right to withdraw at any stage of the interview



process. Confidentiality was maintained by removing identifying details from transcripts and reporting findings in anonymized form.

In addition to interview data, contextual information was obtained from publicly available organizational materials related to the organization’s activities and humanitarian mission. The use of multiple data sources helped strengthen the credibility of the findings by enabling contextual interpretation of participants’ experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018).

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes within the qualitative data. Thematic analysis enables researchers to systematically organize complex textual data into meaningful categories that represent recurring ideas and experiences expressed by participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

Following data collection, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed repeatedly to ensure accuracy and familiarity with the data. The analysis followed an inductive approach in which codes were generated directly from participants’ narratives rather than being imposed from predefined theoretical categories. In the initial stage, meaningful textual segments related to emotional experiences, relational perceptions, and meaning-making processes were identified through open coding. During subsequent coding cycles, related codes were grouped and refined through iterative comparison, resulting in the consolidation of 27 initial codes into broader categories and ultimately three overarching themes representing employees’ psychological and emotional experiences.

Table 2. Development of Themes from Initial Codes

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Initial Code
Experiencing Purpose and Meaning in Humanitarian Work	Meaning construction	Search for purpose beyond salary
	Value congruence	Alignment with humanitarian mission
	Professional identity integration	Identity-based motivation
	Mission-driven retention	Commitment despite financial limitations
Emotional Fulfilment, Well-Being, and Sense of Belonging	Emotional affirmation	Pride in contribution
	Spiritual meaning-making	Spiritual fulfilment
	Impact-based satisfaction	Emotional reward from beneficiaries



Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Initial Code
Emotional Safety, Support, and Relational Experience	Self-development and inner growth	Personal growth through service
	Leader emotional support	Supportive leadership
	Collective belonging	Team cohesion
	Psychological safety	Open communication climate
	Interpersonal support system	Peer encouragement
	Relational trust	Trust within team

The thematic structure highlights how employees' experiences are shaped by the interaction between personal values, organizational relationships, and emotional support systems within the humanitarian work environment.

To enhance methodological rigor, the study adopted several validation strategies consistent with qualitative research standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was strengthened through repeated transcript review and sustained engagement with the data during the coding process. Peer debriefing was conducted through analytical discussions with scholars knowledgeable in the field of human resource management. These discussions enabled emerging interpretations to be critically examined against the raw data and alternative explanations to be considered, thereby strengthening the credibility of the analysis. Although formal member checking was not conducted, credibility was reinforced through repeated engagement with the transcripts, peer debriefing, and the comparison of perspectives across participants occupying different organizational roles.

In addition, data source triangulation was employed by incorporating perspectives from participants across different hierarchical levels within the humanitarian organization, including operational employees and the Chief Executive Officer. Comparing insights across these roles helped identify converging and diverging patterns in employees' experiences, thereby reducing single-source bias and strengthening the credibility of the findings.

Dependability was ensured through a structured coding framework and the maintenance of an audit trail documenting coding procedures and analytical decisions. Confirmability was reinforced by grounding each theme in participant quotations and deriving interpretations inductively from the data. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the organizational context and participants' roles, enabling readers to evaluate the applicability of the findings to similar humanitarian settings.



Result and Discussion

The analysis of interview data revealed three major themes that explain employees' psychological and emotional experiences while working in the humanitarian organization: meaningful work and sense of purpose, emotional fulfilment and sense of belonging, and psychological safety within the workplace. These themes emerged through the thematic analysis process where patterns in participants' responses were coded and grouped into broader categories reflecting employees' experiences within the organization. The findings highlight how humanitarian employees interpret their work not only as professional duties but also as socially meaningful contributions aligned with humanitarian values. The key findings derived from the thematic analysis are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Key Findings from Thematic Analysis

Key Finding	Description
Work perceived as humanitarian mission	Employees viewed their roles as morally meaningful contributions to humanitarian causes rather than ordinary employment
Emotional fulfilment through impact	Daily tasks gained emotional significance when linked to tangible outcomes such as helping families and communities
Sense of being valued and respected	Feeling important and respected within the organization reinforced emotional satisfaction and commitment
Identity-based moral responsibility	Personal background and lived experiences shaped a strong sense of duty toward humanitarian work

Meaningful Work and Sense of Purpose

The findings indicate that employees strongly perceive their work as meaningful and closely connected to the humanitarian mission of the organization. Participants frequently described their roles as opportunities to contribute to social improvement and to support vulnerable communities. This perception of meaningful work appears to strengthen employees' motivation and commitment toward their organizational responsibilities. One participant expressed this perspective by explaining that *"working here makes me feel that what we do is not just office work, because every activity we organize eventually helps people who really need assistance"* (P3). Similarly, another participant emphasized the personal significance of contributing to humanitarian initiatives, stating that *"when we see the impact of our programs on families receiving support, it reminds us that our work has real meaning and that motivates us to keep working harder"* (P5). From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be explained through Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes that intrinsic motivation is strengthened when individuals perceive their work as meaningful and



aligned with their personal values. In this context, employees' interpretation of their roles as humanitarian contributions reflects a strong alignment between personal values and organizational mission, which enhances internal motivation and sustained engagement (Gagné et al., 2022).

These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that employees become more motivated when they perceive their work as contributing to a meaningful purpose or societal benefit (Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). In humanitarian organizations, employees often interpret their work as a form of prosocial contribution rather than purely economic activity. This perception aligns with the concept of prosocial motivation, which explains that individuals become more engaged when their work directly benefits others (Grant, 2007; Grant & Parker, 2009). Furthermore, the results also support Herzberg's motivation theory, which identifies intrinsic factors such as meaningfulness and recognition as important drivers of employee motivation and satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). In the context of humanitarian organizations, the opportunity to contribute to social causes appears to function as a strong intrinsic motivator for employees.

Employees frequently described their work as part of a broader humanitarian responsibility, which strengthened their psychological attachment to the organization. This interpretation reflects the concept of meaningful work as a socially constructed experience shaped by individual values and the organizational context. Similar arguments have been highlighted in studies emphasizing that personal values and ethical orientations play an important role in shaping how individuals interpret the meaning and purpose of their work (Author, 2022; Author & Mayrhofer, 2024). This suggests that meaningful work in humanitarian contexts extends beyond a cognitive evaluation of job significance to a value-driven psychological process that reinforces identity, purpose, and sustained commitment among employees.

Emotional Fulfilment and Sense of Belonging

Another key theme emerging from the analysis is the presence of emotional fulfilment and a strong sense of belonging among employees within the organization. Participants frequently described the workplace environment as supportive and characterized by collaborative relationships among colleagues. This supportive environment contributes to employees' emotional satisfaction and reinforces their commitment to the organization. One participant explained that *"the team here supports each other, and when someone faces difficulties we usually discuss the problem together and find solutions as a group"* (P4). Another participant highlighted the importance of recognition and positive interactions in the workplace, stating that *"feeling appreciated by colleagues and leaders makes the work more enjoyable and gives us confidence to keep contributing to the organization"* (P1). These findings indicate that emotional fulfilment functions as a key affective mechanism that sustains engagement by reinforcing positive emotional experiences associated with work.



Within the SDT framework, this can be interpreted as the satisfaction of psychological needs, particularly relatedness, which enhances employees' sense of belonging and emotional attachment to the organization (Gagné et al., 2022).

The stated findings support previous research emphasizing the role of workplace relationships in shaping employees' emotional well-being and engagement. The need for belonging is considered a fundamental human motivation that influences individuals' emotional experiences and social relationships in organizational contexts (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). In addition, research on employee engagement suggests that supportive workplace environments and positive interpersonal interactions can enhance employees' psychological well-being and motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In humanitarian organizations where employees often share similar social values and humanitarian goals, these relational dynamics appear to strengthen employees' sense of belonging and emotional attachment to the organization. Research examining emotional experiences and affective labor in organizational settings also indicates that emotional dynamics within the workplace can significantly influence employees' engagement and emotional exhaustion levels (Author, 2023). This also suggests that emotional fulfilment in humanitarian organizations is closely tied to social impact and relational experiences, where employees derive emotional value not only from the work itself but from interpersonal interactions and shared humanitarian goals.

Psychological Safety and Organizational Support

The third theme identified in this study relates to the presence of psychological safety within the organizational environment. Participants reported that they felt comfortable expressing ideas, discussing challenges, and seeking support from colleagues and supervisors. This environment of openness and trust appears to help employees manage the emotional demands associated with humanitarian work. One participant described the organizational climate by explaining that *"if we have ideas or concerns about our work, we can speak openly with our supervisors and colleagues without feeling afraid of negative reactions"* (P2). Another participant highlighted the importance of leadership support in maintaining a positive work environment, stating that *"our leaders are approachable and willing to listen, so it becomes easier for us to share problems and work together to find solutions"* (P6). From a theoretical standpoint, psychological safety can be understood as a relational condition that enables the expression of competence and relatedness needs within the SDT framework. When employees feel safe to express ideas and concerns, they are more likely to engage actively and maintain motivation in demanding work environments (Gagné et al., 2022).

These findings are consistent with the concept of psychological safety, which refers to employees' perceptions that they can express themselves freely without fear of punishment or embarrassment (Edmondson, 1999). When psychological safety is present in organizations, employees are more likely to communicate openly,



collaborate effectively, and participate actively in organizational processes (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). In addition, psychologically safe environments help employees cope with demanding work conditions by providing emotional and social support (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Kahn, 1990). In humanitarian contexts where employees often face challenging operational conditions, the presence of supportive leadership and trusting relationships appears to play a crucial role in sustaining employee engagement and resilience. Related research also shows that supportive organizational contexts and empowerment practices can influence employees' emotional responses and their ability to manage demanding work situations (Author & Halim, 2023). These findings suggest that psychological safety plays a critical role in reducing emotional strain and facilitating adaptive coping mechanisms among employees, particularly in humanitarian contexts characterized by uncertainty and emotional demands.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that meaningful work, emotional fulfilment, and psychological safety function as interconnected psychological and relational resources that collectively sustain employee engagement in humanitarian organizations. These dimensions operate synergistically, where meaningful work provides purpose, emotional fulfilment reinforces affective commitment, and psychological safety enables open communication and resilience. This integrated perspective extends existing research by highlighting how these factors interact dynamically within mission-driven organizational contexts.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the psychological and emotional experiences of employees working in a humanitarian organization, focusing on how meaningful work, emotional fulfilment, and psychological safety influence employee engagement. The findings demonstrate that employees working in the humanitarian sector often perceive their work as more than a professional responsibility. Instead, they interpret their roles as opportunities to contribute to humanitarian missions and support vulnerable communities. This indicates that meaningful work is actively constructed through employees' cognitive and emotional interpretation of their contribution to humanitarian outcomes. This perception of meaningful work strengthens employees' intrinsic motivation and encourages them to remain committed to the organization's goals.

The study also revealed that emotional fulfilment and a sense of belonging play important roles in sustaining employees' engagement within the organization. Positive relationships among colleagues, supportive teamwork, and recognition from supervisors contribute to employees' emotional satisfaction and reinforce their attachment to the workplace. These findings suggest that emotional fulfilment functions as a key affective resource that reinforces employees' sense of belonging and stabilizes their engagement within mission-driven organizational contexts. These



relational dynamics create a supportive environment where employees feel valued and motivated to continue contributing to humanitarian activities.

In addition, the findings highlight the importance of psychological safety within the organizational environment. Employees reported that the ability to communicate openly, share ideas, and seek support from colleagues and leaders helped them manage the emotional and operational challenges associated with humanitarian work. This suggests that psychological safety functions as a critical relational condition that enables employees to cope with uncertainty, maintain confidence, and sustain engagement in emotionally demanding environments. The presence of psychological safety therefore enables employees to maintain confidence, collaboration, and resilience when facing demanding work situations.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that meaningful work, emotional fulfilment, and psychological safety operate as interconnected psychological and relational resources that jointly sustain employee engagement in humanitarian organizations. This integrated perspective extends existing research beyond profit-oriented contexts by highlighting how value-driven motivation, relational dynamics, and supportive organizational conditions interact to sustain long-term engagement in mission-driven environments.

Despite these contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. The research was conducted within a single humanitarian organization with a relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the qualitative design reflects participants' subjective experiences and may not capture all dimensions of employee engagement across different contexts.

Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions can be proposed for organizational practice and future research. First, humanitarian organizations should actively strengthen organizational cultures that emphasize shared values, collaboration, and mutual support among employees. Leaders can enhance employee engagement by recognizing employees' contributions, encouraging open communication, and fostering positive workplace relationships. In particular, reinforcing the connection between daily tasks and humanitarian impact may further strengthen employees' sense of purpose and intrinsic motivation.

Second, organizations may benefit from developing structured support systems that help employees manage the emotional demands associated with humanitarian work. Providing opportunities for peer support, reflection sessions, and professional development programs may help employees maintain emotional well-being and resilience when working in challenging humanitarian environments. Establishing formal mechanisms for emotional support and collective reflection can further enhance employees' capacity to cope with sustained operational pressure.

Finally, future research may expand the scope of this study by examining employee experiences across multiple humanitarian organizations or in different



cultural contexts. Comparative studies involving larger samples or mixed-method approaches may provide deeper insights into how psychological and organizational factors influence employee engagement in mission-driven organizations. Future studies may also examine the role of contextual variables such as leadership styles, organizational structure, and cultural factors in shaping employee engagement within humanitarian settings.

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