

# Happiness management through corporate volunteering in advancing CSR

Happiness  
management  
for advancing  
CSR

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – To respond to recent calls for better understanding of the complexities related to happiness management, especially from the employees' perspective, this study examines how corporate volunteering (CV), as one form of corporate social responsibility (CSR), creates sustainable happiness in business organizations.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Theoretical knowledge of CSR and CV as well as the literature on happiness management was examined to form a preliminary understanding of the phenomenon. The empirical section includes a qualitative multiple case study including two company cases of CV in Finland. The data were collected through qualitative interviews. Empirical analysis was made using thematic coding based on existing theory but also by allowing themes to emerge inductively from the data as well.

**Findings** – The study found that CV enables the emergence of sustainable happiness by allowing individual employee volunteers to transition from individual and rational mindsets to collective and emotional mindsets. A third transition was also identified, a process of change in the volunteers' approach in life that the authors describe as "from actual to potential".

**Originality/value** – The study provides a theoretical contribution to the existing literature on happiness management by identifying the third dimension, from actual to potential, and depicting the way this allows employees to move from a state of being to becoming and thus the emergence of sustainable happiness. The study also contributes to existing literature on CV and CSR by revealing the way CV, as a form of practical CSR activity, generates happiness. This study concludes that companies' strategic activities that engage with society can create sustainable happiness for employees who participate. In order to achieve this, volunteering employees should have the chance to reflect on their experience and constant support from managers.

**Keywords** CSR, Corporate volunteering, Sustainable happiness, Happiness management

**Paper type** Original article

## 1. Introduction

The UN International Day of Happiness is celebrated annually on March 20th throughout the world. In the current era of socio-economic and political unrest, happiness and well-being matter more than ever. But what does happiness mean? The concept of happiness has its roots in ancient Greek term *eudaimonia* which describes the good life (Gavin and Mason, 2004). Over the past 30 years, academic interest in happiness and subjective well-being (SWB) has grown, especially within social sciences, but the concept remains difficult to define (Oishi *et al.*, 2013; Chia *et al.*, 2020; Andrijić, 2022). One proposal has argued that happiness has three aspects: a momentary feeling of joy and pleasure (affective or hedonic), life satisfaction (evaluative) and fulfilment of one's life purpose (eudaimonic) (Layard *et al.*, 2012).

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There is growing interest in understanding the phenomenon of happiness due to its increasing importance in current business and economic discussions, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic (Andrijić, 2022). Within organizations, employee well-being is regarded as resulting in happiness (Hernández *et al.*, 2020). Happiness management has been identified as a key aspect of human resources management and described as a multicultural management model focusing on creativity, commitment, technological innovation, internal entrepreneurship and social responsibility with the aim of promoting happiness within organizations and among people (Sánchez-Vázquez and Sánchez-Ordóñez, 2019). CSR may be a key strategy for happiness management as it is related to employees' welfare, quality of life and the common good (Hernández *et al.*, 2020).

Companies are increasingly expected to engage in CSR actions that have positive social impact on their employees, customers and the surrounding society at large (Raimo *et al.*, 2021). CV is a practical form of CSR activity that responds to this call. CV refers to activities in which firms offer their employees an opportunity to engage in work benefiting a specified societal cause using their working time (Grant, 2012). In CV, companies typically form partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to jointly help the most vulnerable individuals in society (Raimo *et al.*, 2021). While the connection between CSR activities and organizational performance has been explored thoroughly in earlier studies (Gupta and Sharma, 2016), it is still unclear how CV as a CSR activity is connected to its consequences and what the effects are on the internal stakeholders (Espasandín-Bustelo *et al.*, 2020). Scholars have specifically called for research on employees' happiness (Colantonio, 2009) resulting from CSR activities (Raab, 2020). Though there is some understanding of the creation of momentary happiness through a shift from rational and individual mindsets to emotional and collective mindsets, research has not explicated the development of lasting, sustainable happiness (Bhojani and Kurucz, 2021).

In this study, we seek to respond to calls for research on happiness in business organizations by investigating CV as a form of happiness management from the perspective of people involved in volunteering activities. We ask: *How does CV, as a form of CSR, create sustainable happiness in business organizations?*

We carried out qualitative research based on two company cases of CV in Finland. The companies collaborated with NGOs to offer opportunities for volunteering to their employees to support marginalized groups in society. The data was collected through qualitative interviews and the analysis of the interviews included first examining CV's role in happiness management, and then the shifts from individual to collective mindsets and from rational to emotional mindsets.

This paper contributes to the discussion of happiness management (Sánchez-Vázquez and Sánchez-Ordóñez, 2019) through CV in two ways. First, we show how the shifts from individual to collective mindsets and from rational to emotional mindsets form bases for sustainable happiness (Bhojani and Kurucz, 2021) in companies. Secondly, we show based on the data that there is a need to emphasize a shift from actual to potential future experiences to reach sustainable happiness.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1 CV as a CSR activity

CSR is often defined as companies' activities designed to include different social considerations in their strategy and operations (Carroll and Brown, 2018). CSR activities have been traditionally connected to activities which target instrumental aims like improvement of profitability, market share and brand image (Carroll and Brown, 2018). CSR research has thus far emphasized the benefits of corporate social initiatives for companies by mainly measuring corporate financial performance. But there have also been

calls for a broader perspective to CSR which includes the ethics and proper behavior regarding emerging and important social issues (Halme *et al.*, 2020); as Carroll and Brown (2018, p. 64) have said, “there is still much work to be done in teasing out exactly what it means to be ‘good’ in business.” Here we refer to actions that go beyond companies’ normal duty and aim at increasing societal welfare and quality of life (Raimo *et al.*, 2021), including well-being and happiness (Colantonio, 2009; Chia *et al.*, 2020) for the company’s internal stakeholders like employees (Espasandín-Bustelo *et al.*, 2020). Companies are inevitably part of the society within which they operate and thus their engagement with people contributes to the well-being of the surrounding society (Brzustewicz *et al.*, 2022; Chia *et al.*, 2020).

CV is a form of practical CSR activity that responds to the call for companies to engage in socially beneficial activities (Boštjančič *et al.*, 2018). CV, or employee volunteering (Dempsey-Brench and Shantz, 2021), refers to activities in which firms offer their employees an opportunity to engage in work benefiting a specified societal cause without additional compensation (Grant, 2012). CV is a CSR activity through which companies demonstrate their corporate citizenship efforts and engage internal and external stakeholders (Plewa *et al.*, 2015). CV is also an employee engagement initiative (Plewa *et al.*, 2015) through which employees can express care and compassion to beneficiaries outside the organization (Grant, 2012).

CV programs have evolved to represent a wide range of activities, and these are increasingly being adopted in companies of different sizes across industries (Dempsey-Brench and Shantz, 2021). Central in these programs is the direct placement of an employee in a volunteer opportunity (Sekar and Dyaram, 2017). Typically, these programs are organized in collaboration with NGOs who organize the volunteer opportunity (Samuel *et al.*, 2013), while the companies support the activity by allowing the use of working hours for the volunteer work, often as a team-building activity within an annual company-wide day of volunteering (Plewa *et al.*, 2015). Employee participation in CV is influenced by employee motivation but also the way volunteer programs are conceptualized and implemented (Sekar and Dyaram, 2017). In line with the acknowledgement of human capital as the key success factor for companies, CV programs involve human resources leadership to demonstrate company values and to strategically implement CSR programs, differentiating it from other CSR activities such as donations and sponsorships (Sekar and Dyaram, 2017).

From employees’ perspective, CV is seen an activity that is valued as a form of CSR more highly than other forms of philanthropic activities due to the higher personal engagement with the community at large (WorldWide, 2009). Motivations for volunteering can be diverse, including pressure from the employer or co-workers or the ability to get time off from work. It is also, however, the social models that co-workers and supervisors provide through CV that motivate other employees to participate (Boštjančič *et al.*, 2018). CV has also been reported to produce positive results at both the individual and organizational levels (Rodell *et al.*, 2016). CV increases job satisfaction and affective commitment through strengthening a sense of community among employees (Haski-Leventhal *et al.*, 2019). Job satisfaction is considered more rational and based on an individual’s own perspective, whereas affective commitment is emotional and focused more on others’ perspective, such as seeing organizational problems as one’s own (Haski-Leventhal *et al.*, 2019). CV is thus a form of CSR activity that engages employees in a very concrete and emotional activity, providing them with collective experiences and self-fulfillment, thus paving the way to a sense of happiness, too.

## 2.2 Sustainable happiness management

In an era of rapid technological and social change, organizations are dependent on innovative, creative, productive, empathetic, responsible, and happy human resources

(Ravina-Ripoll *et al.*, 2021). According to Ishikawa (1985, p. 97), “In management, the first concern of the company is the happiness of people who relate to it. If the people do not feel happy and cannot be made happy, that company does not deserve to exist.” According to existing research, there is a correlation between happiness and work performance, productivity, creativity, innovation (Sánchez-Vázquez and Sánchez-Ordóñez, 2019) and responsibility (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005). Indeed, one of the most important tasks of top management is to act and engage directly in the cultivation of a working environment that promotes well-being and happiness (Ripoll *et al.*, 2017).

Although the concept of happiness has a long history from the time of Aristotle to the present, there is no agreed definition (Kamel *et al.*, 2017). Happiness as an abstract and complex concept (Chia *et al.*, 2020). Here are some ways people define it as the fulfillment of one’s goals, desires, values and needs (Jacobsen, 2007); positive health, social benefits and welfare (Davidson *et al.*, 2010; Mitchell *et al.*, 2016); the pursuit of engagement (Von Culin *et al.*, 2014) in a collective and cooperative responsibility (Ahuvia *et al.*, 2015) or green exercise and contribution to the society (Barton and Pretty, 2010). Some scholars also propose the concept of sustainable happiness to holistically draw from “individual, community or global well-being without exploiting other people, the environment or future generations” (O’Brien, 2016, p. 1). Drawing upon previous research, sustainable happiness is defined here as the experience of happiness achieved by taking prosocial roles and responsibilities beyond daily routines and tasks for the well-being of the individual and society.

In their attempt to deconstruct sustainable happiness, Bhojani and Kurucz (2021, p. 1105) suggest two mindset developments that contribute to reaching a state of happiness. First, people need to cease focusing on themselves and develop a collective mindset reflecting a relational and ecological understanding of reality. A mindfulness practice that enables individuals to move towards a collective mindset supports integrative thinking and sustainable happiness (Bhojani, 2022). In this collective mindset, there is a sense of interconnectedness between individuals, others and the environment so that individuals find themselves as a part of a larger whole that is connected to others, leading to sustainable happiness (Bhojani, 2022). Integrative thinking and sustainable happiness are beyond the individual. Thus, in line with Bhjohani (2022, p. 48), who states that “Integrative thinking examines the cognitive functions to solve complex issues and sustainable happiness examines an emotional experience of happiness with a societal perspective” (Bhojani, 2022, p. 48), we identify a transition from an individual to a collective mindset as a dimension of sustainable happiness.

We identify a second important transition from a focus on the rational and cognitive towards the emotional and embodied. This is also a mindfulness practice enables a transition from the rational to emotional cultivation as it allows people to develop a deep connection between mind and body and show empathy toward others’ perspectives and ideas (Bhojani, 2022). In her studies, Bhojani (2022) observes that when leaders create space to be with their thoughts and emotions, they have a deeper understanding of a given problem. This is an embodied mindfulness that allows them to listen to both mind and body, express empathy and experience deep listening that leads to integrative thinking (Bhojani, 2022). Both of these mindset shifts, from the individual to the collective and from the rational to the emotional, arguably lead to the development of integrative thinking and thus sustainable happiness.

Through certain management practices, organizations can promote these mindfulness practices and mindset shifts. The management of sustainable happiness in our (business) life, following Navarro (2004, cited in Kamel *et al.*, 2017, p. 4), can take place through three steps: 1) measuring one’s own performance as an employer and improving management; 2) attacking the identified problems particularly in authoritarian leadership management that is considered fundamental, as measuring and not doing anything is worse than not measuring; and 3) adopting practices of communication that introduce the changes at all organizational levels.

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According to [Sánchez-Vázquez and Sánchez-Ordóñez \(2019, p. 252\)](#) happiness management as a multicultural management model concentrates on creativity, commitment, technological innovation, internal entrepreneurship and social responsibility with the aim of promoting happiness within organizations and among people. There are thus three ways that organizations can contribute to the necessary mindset shifts of employees ([Gavin and Mason, 2004](#)). First, knowledge is necessary to make important business decisions. Second, freedom enables us to think independently and make choices at work. And third, virtue supports the development of moral character that is fostered through moral training and practice.

The emergence of sustainable happiness through happiness management is thus achieved by transforming mindsets first from the individual towards the collective, and second from the rational towards the emotional. These mindset changes can take place through frequent positive experiences that are supported by a sense of knowledge, freedom and virtue.

### 3. Methods

This study is qualitative in nature and the research was conducted through interviews with employees to gain in-depth insights ([Denzin and Lincoln, 2011](#)) about the creation of happiness through CV experiences. We include two case companies headquartered in Finland in our study to broaden our understanding of the research phenomenon.

The CV activity within the companies was organized together with NGOs. The idea was to offer employees an opportunity to do one day of volunteer work per year in a project they select from a few options arranged by the company and NGOs. In both companies, CV was a relatively new activity and employees' interest in it was increasing. Participation was considered voluntary, and employees were not expected or pushed to participate even though the company was internally promoting possibility for CV. The first case company is a financial and insurance service provider in Finland. The company has approximately 12,000 employees and 1.7 million customers. The CV activity is mainly about helping youth to balance and plan their use of money to improve their financial householding competence. The CV activity consists of company employees sharing their professional competence in one-day training courses. Company employees also help their partnering NGO with service design to improve the NGO's services to people who need help.

The second case company is a telecommunications services provider in Finland. The company has approximately 5,000 employees and it offers telecom and other digital services to about 2.8 million customers both in Finland and Baltic countries. The company offers its employees the possibility of using one working day for their chosen CV activity. In one project, their employees can work in cafés meant for youth where they are able to discuss their daily issues with safe adults. Other projects consisted of garden work in safe homes and assisting differently abled children in a theatrical play.

The interviews were conducted with company managers responsible for organizing CV activities and with employees who participated in CV projects as volunteers. The interviewed volunteers were chosen by the company managers based on the instructions of the researchers. We asked the managers to invite volunteers who had recently participated in the CV activity and to include both male and female employees. The final list of informants was accepted by the researchers, and one informant did not show up to the interviews due to unknown reasons. The informants represented a small, but we believe representative and informative sample of the overall volunteers in both companies. The data collection took place between 2018 and 2019. The interviews included questions about motivation and the overall CV experience; in addition, managers were also asked about volunteer activity at the company level. The interviews were conducted with an emphasis on confidentiality, and

the negative aspects and critiques of the CV experience were discussed to allow informants, especially the volunteers, to freely express both their positive and negative feelings towards the experience. A summary of interview details is listed in [Table 1](#). This study focuses especially on the perception that employees have of the CV practices developed by the companies they work for and how these projects have impacted their sense of happiness (Raab, 2020).

For the analysis of our interview data, we developed a coding system based on the theoretical insight that sustainable happiness occurs where employees' experiences move 1) from an individual, self-centered mindset to a collective and relational mindset and 2) from a rational to an emotional and embodied mindset. Additionally, as repeated positive experiences of that form are necessary, we added a third analysis code: from single to multiple events. All three codes were used to analyze the interview transcripts.

The data was first analyzed by all authors individually. Thereafter, the results were commonly discussed and, where doubt arose, re-analyzed by all authors to find common understanding. In the following section, we present the outcome of our analysis, categorized into the three development dimensions: from an individual to collective mindset, from a rational to emotional mindset and frequent positive experiences including freedom, knowledge and virtue. To open the chain of evidence in the analysis, we present extracts from the interview data. However, these are only a small excerpt of the data on which our interpretations are based. The analyzed development dimensions were embedded in the data broadly, and their existence cannot be fully demonstrated with a narrow quotation. Thus, the purpose of the extracts is merely to offer an example of the data on which the interpretation is based.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 From an individual to a collective mindset

The data illustrated how CV turned volunteers' focus toward others and collective perspectives. For people who were used to working independently, the volunteer activity was an opportunity to learn about collaborating with other volunteers to carry out the work. They noted that while it is important to do good, it is also important to do it together. This was reflected in the volunteers' willingness to continue the work as a joint activity, though the individuals did not know each other in advance.

At the end of the day, we even agreed to come next year, regardless of whether the corporate volunteering continues – that we, the same group of volunteers, can do the same job next year, too, as the same job needs to be done every spring and autumn. (Business Services Expert, Emp 2.3)

Work profile of interviewee	Duration
<i>Case company 1: Financial and insurance service provider</i>	
CSR Specialist/Manager, (Com 1)	28 min
Services Development Specialist (Emp 1.1)	30 min
Customer Service Development Specialist (Emp 1.2)	29 min
Business Development Specialist (Emp 1.3)	29 min
<i>Case company 2: Telecommunications services provider</i>	
HR Manager and Communications Manager (Com 2.1, Com 2.2)	63 min
Communication Specialist (Emp 2.1)	28 min
Customer Service Developer (Emp 2.2)	31 min
Business Services Expert (Emp 2.3)	34 min
Customer Data Developer (Emp 2.4)	49 min

**Table 1.**  
Interview data

**Source(s):** Table by authors



Turning from one's own work to see broader societal issues, as a collective experience with colleagues, created more meaningful work, as illustrated in the following quote:

I got to know them [colleagues] better, and I feel like they were interested in doing this kind of voluntary work because all of them had done one day of voluntary work before, and they felt that the day was good. And it's kind of nice to do something that is connected to one's own job. But they also want to do something more meaningful. And this project was a sort of answer to that need. (Services Development Specialist, Emp 1.1.)

In the data, the interviewees also described how the volunteer activity started to spread from one volunteer to others working in the company or from one activity to wider collective activities. The ones who had volunteering experience wanted to spread the experience and encourage others to join the CV projects. The company started CV activities in one town and soon the other units in different towns wanted to join as well. And in some projects the companies started to collaborate with other companies in the same business field to conduct the activities jointly. For example, one manager told a story of how one team won a monetary award at work, but they didn't want to keep the money for themselves:

Then the team told me that they had decided not to keep the money for themselves, but rather to give it to an NGO [which helps children]. It is nice how the mindset of helping spreads and grows. (HR Manager and Communications Manager, Com 2.1 and Com 2.2.)

All in all, it appeared from the data that once the volunteer activity started, single individuals joined the activities, but they also started to think about how to encourage others to join. This illustrates the transition from the individual to the collective mindset, as the volunteers felt that volunteering themselves was not enough, but that more people should volunteer too, advancing the sense of collective action.

Somehow, we should encourage it more so that other employees would try it [CV] as well. That is the way I would myself develop this [CV activity at the company] further. (Service Development Specialist, Emp 2.1)

Also, one single activity led to a wider set of activities even beyond what the company was formally offering. People started to organize activities themselves both outside of work and at work, such as collecting Christmas presents for children in lower-income families. There was also the expectation that the company would continue the work for collective good and social purposes.

#### *4.2 From a rational to an emotional mindset*

Based on the data, corporate volunteering (CV) activity represented an emotional experience to the volunteers. Although the starting point and motivations behind the CV activity entailed emotional aspects, the role of emotions appeared to be deepened through the volunteering work. CV and the related emotional experience allowed the volunteers to transition from a rational to an emotional mindset: before the CV activity, they had the willingness to do good, and through CV they were able to concretize this and to experience the doing of good emotionally. The idea of career change emerged in our data, illustrating the extent to which this experience was felt.

I know that and I'm struggling here at [the company] day to day, if I don't think I'm doing enough for the greater good or for the society or planet or whatever. So that's why I think, I don't know if it's the project or me personally, but this is something that I really got into and I really want to do more. I don't know if it's volunteer work or is it more like I want to do this for a living, doing something other than core, hard business. (CSR Specialist/Manager, COM 1)

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Interestingly, both rational and emotional elements were intertwined in the CV experience and related processes as the CV also increased the knowledge and awareness of social sustainability issues of the volunteers. However, the presence of strong emotional aspects appeared to also strengthen the creation of the cognitive. Here the type of volunteering seemed to play a role: as the volunteers in our data implemented a service design project to solve an NGO's challenge related to increasing empathy in the society, it seemed to also create a learning experience for the participants. Also, in general the CV seemed to create awareness of diversity in society, connecting to both the rational and emotional.

So, through the project, I think I learned about empathy, about understanding different people. As a person I feel like I learned, but my role was to organize the project, so I feel that the people who actually made the design and focused on the problem and solved it – they learned even more than me. (Service development specialist, Emp 1.1.)

Overall, the main outcome of the CV for the volunteers appeared to be connected to increased appreciation of their employer's CSR efforts to do good for society, but also at the personal level the emotional value of the sense of doing good. The following quotation from a volunteer's discussion with a beneficiary illustrates this:

[An individual beneficiary] said to me once, 'What the heck are you doing here when you are not getting paid to work here?' I just replied that I do get paid, but not in money. (Customer Data Developer, Emp 2.4)

CV enabled the volunteers to transform their mindset from thinking rationally to being deeply emotionally involved as CV allowed them to concretize their desire to do good. It also allowed them to transform their mindset towards a deep emotional experience of doing good, while also increasing the cognitive and emotional aspects.

#### *4.3 Frequent positive experiences: knowledge, freedom, virtue*

In our data, volunteers personally benefited from their participation in CV, as they developed themselves by building relationships with beneficiaries that help volunteers see the surrounding environment. Indeed, we found CV activities acting as an eye-opener for volunteers where they were able to make a difference by connecting with others, sharing and developing experience and knowledge. As one employee said:

This kind of getting involved, directly involved . . . and approaching others has gotten a lot better. I don't mean to say that I wasn't any good at it or had problems with it but approaching strangers and spontaneously coming up with a conversation topic, [. . .] and relating to youth's thoughts and reacting to them, that I would like to think I got better at. (Customer Data Developer, Emp 2.4)

In the data, volunteers noted a tendency to repeat the CV activities. For some of the employees, engaging in CV is the starting point for understanding the circumstances of beneficiaries. By having the chance to freely choose to continue the CV, they can expand their horizon of responsibility, which cannot be limited to certain activities. They see an existing problem and through involvement in CV, they contribute to solving that problem freely. The freedom to continue volunteering gives employees the independence to see how much potential they have to really make a difference, even beyond the CV projects organized by their employer. One of the employees describes the freedom to continue CV as follows:

I'm doing my day [for CV] next year as well. I noticed that I've been thinking of this after we had this last session and thought that if I saw someone on the street or whatever, I'd definitely want to discuss and ask how they're doing and kind of, if I could, somehow take action in their life . . . But yeah, I'm definitely going to participate next year as well. It doesn't have to definitely be the same project, but some other maybe. (Customer Service Development Specialist, Emp 1.2)



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We found that frequent positive experiences through CV strengthens the social interactions of employees. They learn and continue to practice CV, thus cultivating moral virtue in which they freely choose their sphere of influence and decisions to commit to something. This makes volunteers move towards beneficiaries unconditionally and, as such, makes employees responsible citizens. As we illustrate in the quotation below, moral virtue comes from civic participation in CV that develops an employee's moral character.

So, I think in a way these volunteer projects are helping us to look like we actually care about people, and we want to do good stuff and we want to give our time for people in need . . . if you want to help the elderly or do something for the environment, you can do that. (Services Development Specialist Emp 1.1)

To summarize, participants want to continue their volunteer work because of an emerging sense of fulfilment stemming from CV. They understand how they can make a difference, even in small, in their society. This understanding enables them to complete their CV tasks and think about future possibilities and ways to help other people.

## 5. Discussion

Our data analysis revealed that CV enables transitions within volunteers' mindsets not only from individual to collective and from rational to emotional; a third transition was also identified, what we call "from actual to potential".

Our findings indicated that CV allowed volunteers to make a mindset transition from *individual to collective*. In sustainable happiness literature, this kind of departure from a self-oriented view has been argued to be a central element of the emergence of a sense of happiness (Bhojani and Kurucz, 2021). In addition, the CV experience also advanced a collective mindset in terms of spreading the experiences and willingness to engage CV within the surrounding social environment such as among co-workers. It resulted in concrete actions. The managers supporting CV activities in companies should create opportunities for individuals to share about the experience in concrete ways, such as in communications about volunteering or how employees could engage more widely in CV activity.

In terms of the *rational to emotional* mindset transition, our study revealed that CV indeed offer volunteers opportunities to engage in emotionally deep experiences, both by being able to do good through CV but also in being a member of an organization engage in concrete CSR activities. Positive emotional experiences, being a key element in the emergence of happiness (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005), were strong throughout our data. As our analysis indicated, responsibility and social and environmental concerns, however, are not merely about emotions, but also about knowledge that increases awareness of sustainability issues. Thus, CV appeared to extend cognitive awareness but also to strongly strengthen the emotional aspect of responsibility among the CV participants. We suggest that CV is a way to create sustainable happiness through two dimensions: mindset transitions moving from individual to collective and from rational to emotional, identified from the earlier literature (Bhojani and Kurucz, 2021).

In addition, however, our analysis also revealed an important third transition, a process of change in the volunteers' approach in life which we describe as *from actual to potential*. This process is a transition from being to becoming; actual represents the being state while potential is the becoming state (Nelson, 2015). In the previous literature, life as a project of becoming has been suggested to be a strong indicator of a happy life (Şimşek, 2009, p. 511). Moreover, becoming is a journey with meaning and purpose, and it is also a continuous journey, while being is specific space-time snapshots (Nelson, 2015). Based on our findings, volunteers can become or obtain something such as becoming a more responsible citizen or making a difference in beneficiaries' lives. This finding is in line with the human development

that is critical for human flourishing and happiness. In human life there is a being-becoming gap between “the ways things are, and the way things should be” that is bridged by development and moving towards something different from what we are (Marquez, 2006, p. 151). In other words, our potential to become is linked to our actual being (Gibbs, 2014).

Earlier in this study we discussed how happiness derives from three key characteristics: *knowledge*, *freedom* and *virtue* (Gavin and Mason, 2004). On the basis of our empirical insights, we suggest that these characteristics relate to the third identified transition, from actual to potential, because through CV companies provide employees an opportunity to “spend their days not only earning a good living but also feeling as if they are contributing to the ‘greater good’” (Gavin and Mason, 2004). Employees feel happiness because they move toward becoming a better citizen and a more responsible and altruistic employee (Gavin and Mason, 2004).

In the CV activities, employees acquired new *knowledge* and they learned about other people. This extends the previous studies which suggest that in our contemporary life, happiness is highly related to becoming, so that there is no room for “to be or not to be” but only “to become or not to become” (Şimşek, 2009, p. 511). For human beings there is always a connection between being and becoming, between constancy and change, which leads to human development (DeRobertis, 2021). In our data, during the CV activities, volunteers develop themselves and increase their awareness and consciousness. In other words, they transcend themselves, and this transcendental awareness and consciousness leads to self-actualization and happiness, according to Amram (2005). The tendency to repeat CV in our data indicates that employees first do concrete work such as CV, and then they acquire more knowledge and awareness that reveal and uncover their potential for taking pro-social roles and responsibilities. This finding is in line with a previous study by Supanti *et al.* (2015) who found that CV as a form of CSR engagement reveals and develops potential capabilities among employees involved in these activities.

In our analysis volunteers experience the *freedom* to participate in the CV projects and choose the activity to participate in. They see a need for help and move towards that need. In other words, they try to complete something, thus finding happiness. This resonates with the claim that “all happiness is rooted in an experience of *incomplete* completion” (DeRobertis, 2016, p. 76, italics original). This completion is important because in addition to having a positive feeling and well-being in the work environment, happiness is related to the success of a project (Krasnopolskaya, 2014). As we discussed earlier, moral character is one of the characteristics that leads to happiness. Our data demonstrates that CV is an action that develops the character of the volunteers as moral agents by becoming responsible citizens (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022).

Concerning *virtue*, the data also indicated that for volunteers, the type of activity is not important. It is rather the nature of the CV that is inspiring and provides them with opportunities for becoming. This is supported by previous studies which argued that “for the process of becoming a person to unfold one must be able find a milieu in which to act and grow according to one’s truest nature, which entails bringing one’s most genuine, prosocial, value-oriented potentials to realization” (Winthrop, 1961 cited in DeRobertis, 2021, p. 23–24). CV as a prosocial activity leads to happiness because it opens unlimited horizons of possibility that move in the direction of an “always more to come” (DeRobertis, 2016, p. 77). The value-laden nature of CV fosters moral virtue in employees. Moral virtue is in becoming. As Landes (2014, p. 160) correctly points out, “a virtuous person would need to cultivate a practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) in order to negotiate values and norms in a productive and responsible way, a non-virtuous person withdraws from relations and becoming, and a vicious person attempts to freeze becoming or to block alternatives within the metastable set of possibilities.”

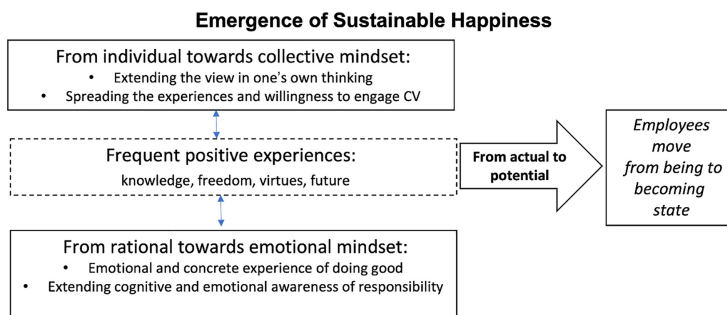
We also found that the *future* also represents an essential aspect in sustainable happiness because becoming is related to the future. It is about creating or changing something (Nelson, 2015), to become something other than what somebody has been (DeRobertis, 2021). This future-orientation and intention to change is seen in our data in the volunteers' intentions for CV continuation. This continuation gives them an opportunity to exercise what they want to become. This is in line with the existing research that shows happiness is situated in an open-ended becoming (DeRobertis, 2016) because "human becoming never ceases" (Di Paolo and De Jaegher, 2022, p. 244).

Participating in CV increases employees' happiness (Gorovei, 2020) because they become more involved in a CSR program, experience a greater sense of identity and become independent in their sphere of influence (Krasnopolskaya, 2014). CV creates possibilities for becoming which is important in the transition to a sustainable level of happiness and well-being. Figure 1 represents the three transitions towards sustainable happiness. These transitions are interconnected and cultivate the state of becoming as a historically human aspiration. As Strasser (1997, cited in DeRobertis, 2016, p. 75) has argued, "individuals, communities, nations, and cultures are in the perpetual process of becoming, making a strict taxonomy of happiness."

## 6. Conclusions

To respond to recent calls for better understanding of the complexities related to happiness management, especially from employees' perspective (Raab, 2020; Colantonio, 2009), the present study has focused on examining the way that CV, as one form of CSR, can create sustainable happiness in business organizations.

Our study concludes, firstly, that CV allows individual employee volunteers to change their mindsets from individual towards collective and from rational towards emotional, both of which have been identified as key dimensions of the emergence of sustainable happiness in previous literature (Bhojani and Kurucz, 2021). Thus, CV can be considered a happiness management tool. In addition to these two dimensions, our study also identified a third dimension that allows us to understand the way CV can create sustainable happiness at a deeper level. CV can be seen as the starting point for employees in their journey from being towards becoming. Becoming can be regarded as an endless process, and it involves a continuous transition towards something more than what someone is now. The journey of becoming is, first, an exploration to discover deeper emotions, thus moving from a rational mindset to an emotional mindset; and second, it is a constant shift from an individual to a collective mindset. In the ongoing process of becoming, people discover new lands of the unknown that have the potential to make a change and difference. They find happiness



Source(s): Figure by authors

Figure 1. Management of sustainable happiness

because of the new horizons of possible development (DeRobertis, 2016). Becoming never rests on the idea of stability and the present, so it relates to the dynamics of the future and is located on the path to sustainable happiness. For sustainable happiness, people need to make a new pattern of activities, such as CV, to generate fresh positive experience in order to achieve a higher level of happiness (Sheldon *et al.*, 2010). This higher level of happiness “requires us to examine who we should become and who we are becoming while we are reflecting” (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022, p. 185).

Our study provides a theoretical contribution to the existing literature on happiness management (e.g. Şimşek, 2009; Sánchez-Vázquez and Sánchez-Ordóñez, 2019; Chia *et al.*, 2020; Bhojani and Kurucz, 2021) by identifying a third dimension, from actual to potential, and depicting the way this allows employees to move from a being to becoming state and thus the emergence of sustainable happiness. Being is renewed by becoming because becoming is about a movement to create positive change towards a better future (Nelson, 2015). Through CV employees have the potential to create this positive change leading to maximizing employees’ potential and happiness (Gazzola and Mella, 2017). This contribution re-emphasizes the following argument made by Nelson (2015, p. 5): “the more abstraction into self-awareness, reflection and change towards a future potential [becoming], the less fixed of a self-concept in the permanence of now that resists or fears change [being]”. The positive changes employees made through CV are associated with increases in well-being and sustainable happiness (Bao and Lyubomirsky, 2014).

The present study also contributes to the existing literature on CV and CSR by revealing the way CV, as a form of practical CSR activity, generates happiness. While the large number of benefits achievable by volunteers and organizations engaging in CV has received extensive research attention (Plewa *et al.*, 2015; Haski-Leventhal *et al.*, 2019), happiness has remained somewhat less explored. So far, CV has often been seen as rationally and cognitively organized and implemented, but our study suggests that CV can create happiness when emphasizing the becoming aspect (emotional, embodied) and raising it from the individual to the relational level.

The present study suggests several managerial implications. Companies’ strategic activities to engage with society through CV can be part of happiness management because participating in those activities affects how employees experience the workplace. There are some issues to address when considering CV as a CSR strategy tool to improve sustainable happiness management. While organizing the activities, managers should consider how to help the early, active participants to share their experience and how to make the activity continue and grow into becoming a collective experience. Managers should also create space for volunteering employees to share and reflect on the volunteering experience and connected emotions (Nguyen and Crossan, 2022) to be able to shift from rational thinking towards an emotional experience of sustainable happiness. An important managerial contribution is that CV can create an experience which opens the route for imagining the future possibilities of becoming something else than what a person is now, and in doing so create the possibility for sustainable happiness. This can be supported through giving volunteers the possibility to continue CV not simply as a one-off activity, but to make it more frequent. Volunteering was a kind of triggering event for growth towards sustainable happiness, and for that process to continue there needs to be continuous support and resources, such as time to do volunteering from managers.

In terms of limitations, the present study needs to be assessed through the limitations resulting from our empirical choices. To allow this, we have carefully explained the critical choices made and the contextual issues such as the organizations and their CV activities. However, the crucial part of the research phenomenon, happiness itself, represents an empirical phenomenon that is difficult to capture empirically. However, to capture happiness from the empirical data, we conducted a thorough conceptual analysis based on the literature.

Regarding future research, we see it as important to investigate whether there is variation in how volunteers experience happiness connected to volunteering activity. Although not directly in our focus, our data gave some indication of this. Raab (2020) has found that elderly employees' workplace happiness experience may differ from younger colleagues. The experience of younger workers, so-called Generation Z, in particular may vary as there is evidence that they are more aware of sustainability than previous generations (Gaidhani *et al.*, 2019).

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