Why happy employees help: How meaningfulness, collectivism, and support transform job satisfaction into helping behaviours

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Abstract

Purpose—Drawing from conservation of resources theory, this study investigates the relationship between employees' job satisfaction and helping behaviour, and particularly how it may be moderated by two personal resources (work meaningfulness and collectivistic orientation) and one organizational resource (organizational support).

Design/methodology/approach—Quantitative data were collected from a survey administered to employees and their supervisors in a Pakistani-based organization.

Findings—The usefulness of job satisfaction for stimulating helping behaviour is greater when employees believe that their work activities are meaningful, emphasize collective over individual interests, and believe that their employer cares for their well-being.

Practical implications—The results inform organizations about the circumstances in which they can best leverage employees' positive job energy, which arises from their job satisfaction, to encourage their voluntary assistance of other organizational members.

Originality/value—This study extends research on positive work behaviours by examining the concurrent roles that job satisfaction and several contingent factors play in promoting employee helping behaviour. In particular, it highlights the invigorating effects of these factors on the usefulness of the enthusiasm that employees feel about their job situation for increasing their willingness to extend help to other members, on a voluntary basis.

Keywords: helping behaviour; job satisfaction; work meaningfulness; collectivistic orientation; perceived organizational support

Introduction

Employees can contribute significantly to their organizations' competitive advantages through their helping behaviours or propensity to voluntarily assist co-workers in completing their job tasks (Choi and Moon, 2016; Chou and Stauffer, 2016; Tang et al., 2008; Zhu and Akhtar, 2014). Such helping behaviours, not required by formal job descriptions, can enhance the success of individual co-workers, the collective performance of selected groups of employees, and the organization overall (Bachrach et al., 2006; Borman and Motowidlo, 1993; Cirella, 2016; Ng and Van Dyne, 2005; Podsakoff et al., 1997), as well as benefit the performers of these activities. For example, employees who take an active interest in the well-being of co-workers and assist them voluntarily may experience personal fulfilment (Hoption, 2016; Lemoine et al., 2015) and receive reciprocal help from those co-workers (Deckop et al., 2003; Hui et al., 2000). Performing voluntary helping activities also can be challenging for employees though, in that these activities can lead to fatigue and undermine their ability to complete their own regular job tasks (Bolino et al., 2015; Koopman et al., 2016). In particular, when employees spend significant time listening to co-workers' problems or going out of their way to find solutions, the associated distractions may reduce their focus on completing the job tasks that have been formally assigned to them (Bergeron, 2007; Van Dyne and Ellis, 2004).

In light of the benefits and challenges that might come with exhibiting helping behaviour, we propose that an important driver of such behaviours is the extent to which employees feel satisfied with their job situation or the enthusiasm they express toward their work (Agho et al., 1992; Rayton and Yalabik, 2014). Previous studies cite various positive outcomes of job satisfaction, such as enhanced organizational commitment (Kim and Back, 2012), job performance (Sun and Pan, 2008), innovation (Yen-Ku et al., 2014), and voluntary citizenship

behaviours (Chin, 2015) Yet beyond a general sense that job satisfaction stimulates employees to do more than is required by their formal job descriptions, previous research has not established universal support for its benefits. Rather, prior studies identify weak positive connections of job satisfaction with extra-role work behaviours (Way et al., 2010) or caution that the links depend on the strength of the positive attitudes that employees exhibit toward their job (Schleicher et al., 2015). This ambiguity might stem from the time-consuming nature of voluntary efforts to reach out to individual colleagues who seek help (Bolino et al., 2013; Podsakoff et al., 2009). Even if positive job energy, in the form of job satisfaction, spurs employees to undertake helping behaviours, these efforts might be perceived as worthwhile only to the extent that employees can rely on valuable resources that make the outcomes of their efforts attractive (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). Employees might not be willing to channel their positive job energy into discretionary helping behaviour, and the key question becomes, Which circumstances trigger this energy allocation? This research gap warrants further attention (Schleicher et al., 2015).

In response, we seek to gain a better understanding of the conditions in which job satisfaction is most likely to spur discretionary helping behaviours, so that organizational decision makers can establish *when* these behaviours are most likely to materialize among happy employees (Schleicher et al., 2015). The theoretical arguments for how and when employees' job satisfaction stimulates their propensity to help their colleagues are anchored in conservation of resources (COR) theory. According to this theory, employees' engagement in discretionary work behaviours is informed by the resource gains that they expect to achieve from these behaviours (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). In particular, this theory postulates that employees are more likely to undertake positive work behaviours, such as helping co-workers, to the extent that they can leverage their current personal energy reservoirs to create additional resource gains (Hobfoll,

2001). Assisting co-workers voluntarily can be beneficial for employees, in that it might generate reciprocal behaviours at some later point in time (Deckop et al., 2003) or offer a general sense of fulfilment (Hoption, 2016). Thus, the application of positive job energy derived from job satisfaction may generate significant resource gains if employees undertake helping behaviours.

In addition, COR theory suggests an important *invigorating* role of employees' access to complementary resources—whether personally held or embedded in the surrounding organizational context (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000)—for predicting their positive work behaviours. This access may trigger allocations of personal energy resources to these behaviours, in anticipation of the additional benefits that result from such allocations. As the notion of resource gain spirals suggests (Hobfoll, 1988, 2001), the process of channelling positive job energy into discretionary work activities is especially effective when employees have access to complementary resources that make the process personally attractive. Consistent with this logic, we postulate that the positive energy that employees derive from their own job satisfaction spurs their helping behaviours to a greater extent when they (1) believe their work is meaningful, (2) possess a strong collectivistic orientation, and (3) perceive that they operate in a supportive organizational environment. A sense of work meaningfulness captures the extent to which employees deem their work important (Fry et al., 2005; Luoh et al., 2014); their collectivistic orientation reflects the extent to which they give precedence to group over individual interests (Triandis, 2001; Triandis and Gelfland, 1998); and their perceptions of organizational support reflect their beliefs that the organization is concerned about their goals and opinions (Eisenberger et al., 1997; Shen et al., 2014).

Formally, we propose that the positive relationship between job satisfaction and helping behaviour should be stronger at higher levels of work meaningfulness, collectivistic orientation,

and organizational support. These three factors, which serve as moderators in our conceptual framework, can generate additional resource gains for employees when they decide to leverage their job satisfaction into voluntary activities that improve the job situation of their colleagues (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). That is, they stimulate employees to apply their positive energy to voluntary helping behaviours, because these efforts are perceived as highly desirable (Hobfoll, 2001). With our focus on these three contingent factors, we provide a consistent, comprehensive perspective on how employees' access to specific resources, either personally held or embedded in their organizational environment, may fuel the anticipated value of applying personal energy to discretionary helping activities (Quinn et al., 2012).

In short, we contribute to previous research by investigating how job satisfaction, as a critical source of job-related energy, stimulates extra-role discretionary helping behaviours, as well as the circumstances in which this process is likely to materialize. Previous studies indicate that extra-role work activities can be a source of personal satisfaction for their performers (Lemoine et al., 2015; Organ, 1988), but we argue that the enthusiasm employees feel about their job situation by itself also might prompt their helping behaviours. Moreover, we argue that the positive energy that employees possess when they feel enthusiastic about their job situation should more prominently stimulate their helping activities to the extent that they have access to adequate personal and organizational resources. Previous research has investigated the *direct* effects of this study's focal contingency factors, with evidence that the propensity to undertake work activities that are not formally listed in job descriptions might be greater to the extent that employees believe their work is important and has a central role in their lives (Uçanok and Karabati, 2013), are concerned about group instead of individual interests (Van Dyne et al., 2000), and sense that their employer actively supports their success (Lemmon and Wayne, 2015).

However, such investigations leave unanswered the question of how these factors may stimulate employees to apply their positive energy bases to voluntarily assist co-workers. This oversight is important, because it prevents organizations from understanding *when* measures targeted at making employees happy with their work might return the greatest value. The positive energy that resides in employees, due to how excited they feel about their job, may enable their positive working behaviours (Lu et al., 2013; Quinn et al., 2012); the contingency factors we study (work meaningfulness, collectivistic orientation, and perceptions of organizational support) inform the motivations to *leverage* this positive energy as productive helping behaviours.

The study also adds value through its empirical context. Pakistani culture is generally risk averse (Hofstede, 2001), such that some employees may be reluctant to go out of their way to assist co-workers voluntarily, because such efforts might undermine their ability to meet their formal job requirements (Bergeron, 2007). The issue of the relative usefulness and impact of access to relevant resources for translating job satisfaction into enhanced helping behaviour thus becomes particularly relevant in this study context. In a more general sense, previous research indicates the need for more investigations of the predictors of extra-role work behaviours in non-Western country settings, to provide clearer insights into how organizations that operate in different countries can exploit the energy and talent that resides within their employee bases to promote behaviours that benefit the company and its members (Pooja et al., 2016; Rurkkhum and Bartlett, 2012; Uçanok and Karabati, 2013). The current investigation of the interplay of job satisfaction with several enabling contingency factors, as a means to explain helping behaviours in the understudied context of Pakistan, seeks to address this gap.

Theory and hypotheses

Helping behaviour

Prior research points to the need for more studies on how employees' positive energy can be channelled into discretionary work behaviours that contribute to organizational effectiveness but are not formally required (e.g., Arthaud-Day et al., 2012; Choi and Moon, 2016). Such extra-role behaviours are not restricted to activities that directly add to organizational performance but also can manifest indirectly, through employees' efforts to reach out to individual colleagues and facilitate the successful completion of their job tasks (Chou and Stauffer, 2016; Tang et al., 2008). That is, a critical distinction in prior organizational citizenship research highlights the difference between extra-role activities targeted at the organization in general and those targeting individual co-workers (Williams and Anderson, 1991). We focus on the latter, and particularly the extent to which employees go out of their way to help co-workers complete their job tasks, even if these efforts are not formally required (Chou and Stauffer, 2016). With this focus, we acknowledge the central role of positive interpersonal exchanges in an organization's micro-social systems, such that employees seek and receive help from immediate peers, which can lead to positive outcomes such as enhanced collective creativity or greater organizational performance (Catmull, 2008; Cirella, 2016; Hargadon and Bechky, 2006).

Helping activities targeted at co-workers are useful for not just the beneficiaries but also for the employees who perform them. For example, voluntarily sharing information with colleagues may prompt reciprocation by those colleagues, who share their valuable knowledge and skill sets (Korsgaard et al., 2010), or it can be a source of personal accomplishment when employees perceive that they have helped others succeed (Hoption, 2016). However, spending significant time on helping activities that are not formally included in job descriptions has a dark side too (Bolino et al., 2013). The time and energy devoted to these discretionary activities may be so distracting and exhausting that employees are not able to complete their formal job duties

(Bolino et al., 2013; Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 2009). Accordingly, it is important to understand why some employees might exhibit a higher propensity than others to go out of their way to help co-workers on a voluntary basis, *despite* these challenges. In particular, there is a continued need to understand how employees' access to adequate resources might steer them toward discretionary, positive work activities for which they do not receive formal rewards (Chen and Kao, 2011; De Clercq et al., 2017; Zhu and Akhtar, 2014).

Combined roles of job satisfaction and complementary resource access

A key premise of this study is that an important enabler of helping behaviour is the extent to which employees feel happy about their job situation (Agho et al., 1992). Job satisfaction, or the enthusiasm that employees feel about their work, is a critical source of positive energy that fuels employees' ability to fulfil their formally prescribed job duties (Jiang et al., 2009; Rayton and Yalabik, 2014; Sun and Pan, 2008). Yet relatively little research has considered the question of how and when employees' excitement about their job situation may steer them to undertake *extra-role* activities to help other organizational members meet their job obligations (Baeza and Wang, 2016; Schleiger et al. 2015). We argue that the accumulation of positive energy resources, stemming from feelings of happiness about their work (Quinn et al., 2012), might steer employees toward spending significant time with co-workers and assisting them, even if this assistance is not part of their own job descriptions. Moreover, in addition to investigating how employees might respond beneficially, in the form of enhanced helping behaviour, we propose that it is of paramount importance to understand the conditions in which organizations can trigger this beneficial effect.

Accordingly, we address the invigorating roles of three valuable resources, each of which might increase the likelihood that employees leverage their positive job energy resources into

helping activities that go beyond formal job duties: (1) the sense that their work is meaningful (Tummers and Knies, 2013), (2) their collectivistic orientation (Triandis and Gelfland, 1998), and (3) their perceptions of organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1997). Our interest in studying the combined roles of job satisfaction and these three complementary resources as enablers of helping behaviour is guided by the recognition that linking positive job energy with these resources can create particularly strong personal fulfilment when employees go out of their way help their co-workers. Thus, we aim to inform organizations about the circumstances in which they might benefit most from leveraging their employees' happy, job-related feelings and their effects on extra-role behaviours that help other individual employees.

COR theory

To substantiate the theoretical arguments about the combined effects of employees' job satisfaction and the three selected resources on their helping behaviours, we turn to conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). This theory predicts that positive job energy resources enhance the likelihood that employees engage in positive work behaviours, because of the associated resource gains that can be achieved (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). Similarly, when employees are enthusiastic about their job situation, the associated positive energy should stimulate them to undertake extra-role helping behaviours, to contribute to the well-being of co-workers but also benefit themselves, through feelings of personal accomplishment and anticipated reciprocation (Foote and Tang, 2008; Quinn et al., 2012).

In turn, employees' sense of work meaningfulness (Fry et al., 2005), collectivistic orientation (Triandis and Gelfland, 1998), and perceptions of organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1997) each should trigger or invigorate the positive relationship between their job satisfaction and helping behaviour. Our interest in these three contingency factors aligns with the

COR logic of resource gain spirals (Hobfoll, 2001), which states that the application of positive job energy to certain work behaviours is particularly likely when employees have access to resources that render such energy applications attractive. That is, the translation of the positive energy generated from a happy job situation into voluntary helping should be enhanced to the extent that employees have access to complementary resources that make this translation more desirable (Hobfoll, 2011; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). With this approach, this study can inform organizations about the circumstances that lend themselves to the likely exploitation of employees' positive feelings about their job situation into helping behaviours (Astakhova, 2015; Quinn et al., 2012).

The conceptual framework is summarized in Figure 1, and its constitutive hypotheses are detailed next. Consistent with COR theory, employees' job satisfaction should spur their helping behaviour, and this effect should be stronger at higher levels of the three contingency factors.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Job satisfaction and helping behaviour

Positive job energy, stemming from excitement about the work situation, means that employees have residual energy at their disposal that they can allocate to extra-role work behaviours (Jiang et al., 2009; Rayton and Yalabik, 2014). According to COR theory, such positive energy can lead to enhanced helping behaviour, because employees are motivated to exploit their personal energy to undertake activities that generate future resource gains (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), which may be manifest in feelings of self-worth, performance gains achieved through reciprocity by targets of helping activities, or indirect appreciation for these activities by the employer (Korsgaard et al., 2010; Lemoine et al., 2015; Lievens et al., 2008). That is, the positive energy derived from happy feelings about a job situation spurs extra-role work activities,

such as voluntarily assisting other organizational members, because of the personal benefits that employees anticipate from such energy allocations (Hobfoll, 2001).

In addition to this resource-enhancing argument, social exchange theory might help explain the positive relationship between job satisfaction and helping behaviour (Blau, 1964). When employees feel enthusiastic about their job situation, they may seek to return the positive feelings by engaging in work efforts that can enhance the success of their co-workers and employer (Cohen and Keren, 2008; Emerson, 1976). In a similar vein, employees who are enthusiastic about their job situation tend to feel emotionally attached to the organization and its constituents (Luna-Arocas and Camps, 2008), such that they feel motivated to perform activities that could help their colleagues with the successful accomplishment of their job tasks (Foote and Tang, 2008; Pooja et al., 2016). Conversely, employees who feel unhappy about their job situation may exhibit a reduced tendency to allocate their energy to positive work behaviours from which their peers and organization can benefit; instead, they may be passive and indifferent about contributing to others' well-being (Jiang et al., 2009; Lu et al., 2013). These arguments indicate that employees' job satisfaction should increase the likelihood that they engage in helping behaviour.

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between employees' job satisfaction and their helping behaviour.

Moderating role of work meaningfulness

Employees' sense of work meaningfulness may have an invigorating effect on the positive relationship between their job satisfaction and helping behaviour. A key premise of COR theory is that positive energy stimulates positive work behaviours to a greater extent when this energy allocation can generate future resource gains, in the form of valued personal outcomes (Hobfoll, 2001). People with a strong sense of work meaningfulness tend to exhibit an

inclination toward voluntarism, such that they perceive great value in leveraging their personal energy to engage in helping activities that can contribute to others' success (Dwyer et al., 2013; Tummers and Knies, 2013). The personal resource of work meaningfulness thus should grant employees personal fulfilment when they leverage their positive energy into voluntary activities that help their co-workers. Similarly, employees for whom work is a central part of their lives tend to feel good about themselves when they invest time in helping other organizational members (Uçanok and Karabati, 2013), so they should be particularly prone to channel their positive feelings about their job situation into extra-role activities. Conversely, employees who have a low sense of work meaningfulness tend to be more passive when it comes to finding ways to add to the success of their work colleagues, rather than going out of their way to leverage their personal energy in activities that add to such success (Tummers and Knies, 2013).

In addition to the positive feelings that these employees may experience when they leverage their enthusiasm into helping activities, an ability-based argument suggests this invigorating role of work meaningfulness too. Undertaking extra-role helping activities can enhance the performance of co-workers, but it also creates the risk that employees will become distracted and lack sufficient time to meet their own performance targets (Bergeron, 2007). In turn, the extent to which their work activities are personally meaningful may enhance employees' competencies for resolving problem situations (Kong et al., 2016), including the challenges that co-workers experience during their job tasks (Podsakoff et al., 2009). Accordingly, employees who sense that their work is meaningful may feel more confident that they can apply their positive job energy to voluntary helping activities, while still being able to meet their formal job obligations (Koopman et al., 2016). Conversely, employees with a low sense of work meaningfulness may lack the ability to combine the successful accomplishment of

their own job tasks with voluntary efforts to help co-workers, so the likelihood that they leverage

positive feelings about their job situation into such efforts is subdued. Instead, these employees

may allocate all their positive energy to their own job obligations (Quinn et al., 2012).

> **Hypothesis 2:** The positive relationship between employees' job satisfaction and helping
> behaviour is moderated by their sense of work meaningfulness, such that the relationship
> is stronger at higher levels of work meaningfulness.

Moderating role of collectivistic orientation

Another invigorating effect may stem from employees' collectivistic orientation. As

previous research underscores, employees' collectivistic values reflect personal resources that

are instrumental for how they behave in the workplace (Astakhova, 2015). Furthermore, COR

theory indicates that employees tend to allocate their personal energy to work activities that align

with their personal value systems, because such alignment creates further resource gains, in the

form of personal fulfilment (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011). Because employees with a strong

collectivistic orientation have a natural tendency to support the collective well-being of their

immediate work environment, rather than focusing on their personal interests (Moorman and

Blakely 1995; Van Dyne et al., 2000), they should be particularly motivated to leverage the

positive energy generated from their happy job situation toward activities that help co-workers,

even if these efforts are not formally included in their job requirements.

Similarly, the notion of a collectivistic orientation implies that employees are concerned

with group harmony and actively support the well-being of colleagues in their work environment

(Clugston et al., 2000; Triandis and Gelfland, 1998). Because the success of their co-workers is

of instrumental importance to employees with a strong collectivistic orientation, they likely feel

motivated to apply the positive energy that they derive from their current job situation to

discretionary activities that allow co-workers to do their jobs more successfully (Van Dyne et al.,

2000). Conversely, employees with a less collectivistic orientation may feel less concern about the well-being of their organizational peers and thus be less likely to invest their positive job energy in ways that might compromise their personal interests, such as by engaging in time-consuming helping efforts (Moorman and Blakely 1995; Triandis, 2001). These employees derive less personal fulfilment from allocating their personal energy to such extra-role activities, so they anticipate that such efforts are less likely to maximize their personal resource gains (Hobfoll, 2011).

> **Hypothesis 3:** The positive relationship between employees' job satisfaction and helping behaviour is moderated by their collectivistic orientation, such that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of collectivistic orientation.

Moderating role of perceptions of organizational support

Finally, employees' perceptions of organizational support may trigger the relationship between job satisfaction and helping behaviours. According to COR theory, employees' access to valuable organizational resources in the presence of positive organizational treatments—such as when they sense that their employer cares for their personal well-being and listens to their input and opinions—increases their ability to fulfil their regular job duties (Abbas et al., 2014; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). Such resource access should reduce any worries that the allocation of their personal energy to extra-role helping behaviours will hinder the fulfilment of their own formal job duties (Bolino et al., 2015). For example, when employees perceive that their organization supports their personal goals and interests, they should feel more comfortable taking the risk of allocating some of their positive energy to voluntary helping behaviours—even if this energy allocation is not formally rewarded and could undermine their ability to meet their regular job requirements—because they are more confident that any negative outcomes will not be penalized (Eisenberger et al., 1997; Shen et al., 2014). Thus, the perception of organizational

support increases the likelihood that employees are willing to go out of their way to channel their positive energy, derived from job satisfaction, into extra-role helping behaviours.

Similarly, employees tend to feel more in control of how to allocate their energy to different work activities to the extent that they believe their organization actively supports their interests (Jonsson et al., 2015). Conversely, to the extent that employees sense that their organization is not preoccupied with their success and fails to accommodate their needs, the associated sense of isolation may create a fear about their ability to meet formal job expectations (Latorre et al., 2016), and accordingly, leveraging their positive job energy toward helping activities that go beyond their formal job duties becomes a less attractive scenario (Rich et al., 2010). Moreover, employees who perceive that they are cared for by their employer likely sense that their organization would be forgiving, even if they cannot meet performance standards set for them (Eisenberger et al., 1997). This belief should help motivate employees to allocate their positive job energy, stemming from their happy feelings about their work situation, to undertaking voluntary helping activities, even if these activities take up time that they otherwise could devote to their formal job obligations (Quinn et al., 2012; Van Dyne and Ellis, 2004).

> **Hypothesis 4:** The positive relationship between employees' job satisfaction and helping behaviour is moderated by their perceptions of organizational support, such that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of perceived organizational support.

Research method

Data collection

The hypotheses were tested with survey data collected from employees who work in sales, as well as their supervisors, in a large organization that operates in the shoe sector in Pakistan. This focus on a single organization eliminates the presence of unobserved differences with regard to how external competitive pressures (Dayan and Di Benedetto, 2011) or aspects of

the organizational climate (Randall et al., 1999) might influence employees' sense of stimulation or pressure to reach out to colleagues. The company embraces an informal expectation that employees who work in sales collaborate closely and offer mutual support when needed, so this context is relevant for assessing employees' willingness to assist colleagues with the successful completion of their job tasks on a voluntary basis. Moreover, the organizational culture assumes that employees coordinate their individual efforts to meet the company's overall sales performance targets, and it emphasizes the importance of the collective contributions that employees make to their company's overall success. Finally, the focal organization's external market is populated with a multitude of players that compete for market share in a relatively stable industry, which imposes strong pressures on employees to support one another in the execution of their job tasks, so their employer can maintain its competitive positioning. Thus the company's internal and external contexts are highly pertinent for investigating how positive job energy can be leveraged as voluntary helping behaviours, as well as how this process may be invigorated by access to valuable resources.

The data were collected in two rounds. First, a survey was administered among a sample of employees in front-end sales, assessing their job satisfaction, sense of work meaningfulness, collectivistic orientation, and perceptions of organizational support. The targeted participants were selected by randomly choosing names from a list of employees provided by the human resource department of the participating organization. Second, another survey, administered three weeks later, targeted the employees' supervisors, who assessed the extent to which their employees performed helping behaviours. The data were collected at these two different time points, rather than concurrently, to avoid reverse causality and expectancy bias—that is, the likelihood that participants might react in ways consistent with their prediction of the research

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hypotheses (i.e., positive feelings about their job situation seemingly should steer them toward voluntary helping behaviours). Yet the three-week period is short enough to diminish the chance that significant organizational events could occur and affect the research hypotheses.

The data collection process followed standard procedures. The cover letters that accompanied the surveys explained the general objective of the study, promised participants complete confidentiality, emphasized that their participation was entirely voluntary, highlighted that their answers would only be accessible to the researchers, and guaranteed that no individual-level data would ever be shared outside the research team. The participants were explicitly informed that there were no right or wrong responses and asked to answer the questions as honestly as possible, which should reduce social desirability bias concerns (Spector, 2006). Finally, respondents could withdraw from the study at any point in time.

Because English is the official language of higher education and business in Pakistan, the surveys were administered in English. After completing the surveys, participants placed them in sealed envelopes and returned them to the research team. From the 300 originally distributed surveys, we received 202 completed sets, for a response rate of 67%. Among the respondents, 29% held a university degree and 18% had worked for more than 10 years of the organization.

Measures

The survey items for the five focal constructs (helping behaviour, job satisfaction, work meaningfulness, collectivistic orientation, and perceptions of organizational support) came from well-established scales.

Helping behaviour. The measure of employees' helping behaviour used a seven-item scale that assessed activities targeted at individual co-workers (Williams and Anderson, 1991). To alleviate concerns about common method bias, this construct was rated by the employees'

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supervisors. Sample items included, 'This employee assists co-workers with their work, even when not asked,' 'This employee takes time to listen to co-workers' problems and worries,' and 'This employee passes along information to co-workers' (Cronbach's alpha = .92).

Job satisfaction. The six-item scale of job satisfaction captured the positive energy that employees derive from their current jobs situation (Abbas et al., 2014; Agho et al., 1992). Example items were, 'Most days I am enthusiastic about my work,' 'I am satisfied with my job for the time being,' and 'I like my job better than the average worker does' (Cronbach's alpha = .90).

Work meaningfulness. Employees' sense that their work is important and meaningful was measured with four items derived from previous studies on the meaning of work (Fry et al., 2005; Spreitzer, 1995). For example, the employees assessed whether 'The work I do is very important to me' and 'My job activities are personally meaningful to me' (Cronbach's alpha = .71).

Collectivistic orientation. To assess the extent to which employees emphasize collective goals and interests, this study used the four-item scale of horizontal collectivism, developed by Triandis and Gelfland (1998). This scale reflects the extent to which people see themselves as part of a collective of equal others. For example, the employees rated their agreement with statements such as, 'If a co-worker gets a prize, I would feel proud' and 'The well-being of my co-workers is important to me' (Cronbach's alpha = .67).

Perception of organizational support. An eight-item scale, based on Eisenberger et al.'s (1997) work, assessed employees' perceptions of organizational support. Three example items were, 'My organizations really cares about my well being,' 'My organization strongly considers

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my goals and values,' and 'My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part' (Cronbach's alpha = .89).

Control variables. The models included two control variables: employees' education (dummy variable, with 1 = university degree) and organizational tenure (1 = 1–10 years, 2 = 11–20 years, 3 = 21–30 years, 4 = 31–50 years).[1]

The convergent validity of the study's focal constructs was assessed with a confirmatory factor analysis of a five-factor model. The factor loadings were strongly significant ($p < .001$) for all items on their respective constructs, indicating convergent validity (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988). Evidence of discriminant validity came from a comparison of the fit of constrained models, in which the correlation between two constructs was set to equal 1, with that of their unconstrained counterparts, in which the correlations between the constructs were free to vary. For each of the ten pairs that could be generated from the five constructs, the unconstrained models achieved superior fit ($\Delta\chi^2(1) > 3.84$, $p < .05$), indicating discriminant validity (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988).

Although the dependent variable (helping behaviour) was assessed by a different respondent (supervisors), we still performed two statistical tests to test for the potential presence of common method bias among the independent and moderator variables provided by the employees. First, we performed Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986) to check whether a single-factor model that included the four constructs—job satisfaction, work meaningfulness, collectivistic orientation, and organizational support—might account for a majority of the total variance in the data. This test revealed that the first extracted factor explained only 34% of the total variance, so common method bias did not appear to be a

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[1] In Pakistan, front-end sales jobs tend to be reserved for men, so the sample consisted of male employees only.

significant concern. Second, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis that compared the fit

of a four-factor model that included the independent and moderating variables with that of a one-

factor model in which each item loaded on a single factor. The first model showed a superior fit

($\Delta\chi^2(6) = 710.82$, $p < .001$), so common method bias was not prominent in our data set (Lattin et

al., 2003). Finally, the threat of common method bias is significantly diminished when testing

conceptual models that entail different moderating effects, because it is difficult for respondents

to understand or anticipate these effects and adjust their responses accordingly (Brockner et al.,

1997; De Clercq et al., 2010; Simons and Peterson 2000).

Results

Table 1 contains the bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics for the study

variables. Table 2 contains the results of hypotheses tests that relied on hierarchical ordinary

least squares regression analysis. Model 1 includes the control variables, and Model 2 adds job

satisfaction and the three moderators: work meaningfulness, collectivistic orientation, and

perceptions of organizational support. Next, Models 3–5 add the job satisfaction $\times$ work

meaningfulness, job satisfaction $\times$ collectivistic orientation, and job satisfaction $\times$ perceptions of

organizational support interaction terms, respectively. Previous research shows that it is

appropriate to include multiple interaction terms in separate models, because their simultaneous

inclusion in one model can hide the presence of true moderating effects (Aiken and West, 1991;

Covin et al., 2006; De Clercq et al., 2014; Zahra and Hayton 2008).

[Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here]

In support of the baseline prediction that the positive energy that arises from happy

feelings about work spurs extra-role work activities, Model 2 reveals that job satisfaction relates

positively to helping behaviour ($\beta = .303$, $p < .001$), in line with Hypothesis 1. Although the

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effects are outside the theoretical focus of this study, the results in Model 2 also show a direct

positive effect of a collectivistic orientation ($\beta = .309$, $p < .05$) on helping behaviour, whereas the

effects of work meaningfulness and perceptions of organizational support are not significant.

Models 3–5 indicate support for the hypothesized invigorating effects of work

meaningfulness ($\beta = .387$, $p < .001$), collectivistic orientation ($\beta = .288$, $p < .05$), and perceptions

of organizational support ($\beta = .296$, $p < .001$) on the positive relationship between job

satisfaction and helping behaviour. The likelihood that higher levels of job satisfaction stimulate

helping behaviour increases to the extent that employees find their work important (Hypothesis

2), emphasize collective interests (Hypothesis 3), and feel strongly supported by their

organization (Hypothesis 4). To clarify the nature of these interactions, Figures 2–4 contain plots

of the effects of job satisfaction on helping behaviour at high and low levels of the three

moderators. The results of the simple slope analyses indicated that the relationship of job

satisfaction with helping behaviour was positive and significant at high levels of work

meaningfulness ($\beta = .733$, $p < .001$), collectivistic orientation ($\beta = .615$, $p < .001$), and

perceptions of organizational support ($\beta = .670$, $p < .001$), but it became non-significant at low

levels of these three moderators ($\beta = -.041$, *ns*; $\beta = .039$, *ns*; $\beta = .078$, *ns*; respectively).

[Insert Figure 2–4 about here]

Although the theoretical and empirical focus of this study is on the *concurrent* interplay

of job satisfaction on the one hand and work meaningfulness, collectivistic orientation, and

perceptions of organizational support on the other, a post hoc analysis also accounted for the

effects of the three moderators on employees' job satisfaction levels. In particular, three path

models, corresponding to the three regression Models 3–5 in Table 2, included the covariances of

the three moderators with job satisfaction. The hypothesized effects were consistent with the

results obtained from the regression analysis and remained robust even after accounting for possible interdependencies of the three moderators and job satisfaction (De Clercq et al., 2009).

Discussion

This study has added to previous research by (1) investigating how employees' job satisfaction might enhance their propensity to assist other organizational members complete their job tasks successfully, even if these efforts are not strictly required by their formal job descriptions, and then (2) detailing when this process is more likely because employees have access to selected personal and organizational resources. The relatively sparse attention to this topic is somewhat surprising, in light of the widespread recognition that even if positive feelings about organizational functioning can be a source of energy that prompts positive work activities (Karriker and Williams, 2009; Quinn et al., 2012; Wei, 2012), such energy allocations also might be challenging and compromise employees' ability to fulfil their formal job tasks (Bergeron, 2007; Koopman et al., 2016). That is, the allocation of positive personal energy resources to voluntary behaviours that help co-workers with their jobs can be indirectly rewarding for employees—by generating personal fulfilment and possible reciprocation by the targets of these behaviours (Hoption, 2016; Hui et al., 2000)—but these discretionary activities also might undermine their abilities to meet prescribed job duties (Bolino et al., 2015).

In response, we have applied the concept of resource gain spirals (Hobfoll, 2001) to predict that employees' job satisfaction enhances their likelihood to help co-workers to a greater extent when their access to valuable resources, whether personal or organizational, make the allocation of personal energy resources to helping activities more attractive. The relationship between job satisfaction and voluntary work behaviours is not automatic (Way et al., 2010), so there is a need to investigate underlying contingencies (Schleicher et al., 2015). Voluntary

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helping behaviours, as responses to positive feelings about a job situation, critically depend on whether employees can rely on relevant resources that make their energy allocation desirable (Hobfoll, 2011). The empirical results support these theoretical predictions.

The direct positive relationship between job satisfaction and helping behaviour aligns with previous arguments that positive feelings about the work environment stimulate behaviours from which the organization and its constituents can benefit, including those that go beyond formal role descriptions (Karriker and Williams, 2009; Randall et al., 1999; Zheng et al., 2012). An important mechanism in this process, according to COR logic, is the resource gains that employees anticipate from leveraging their positive job energy into activities that make a difference to others. Such resource gains can manifest themselves in feelings of personal fulfilment (Lemoine et al., 2015) and access to relevant experiences shared by the targets of the helping activities (Korsgaard et al., 2010), as well as appreciation received from the employing organization, even if not in the form of formal rewards (Lievens et al., 2008). Yet another explanation, consistent with social exchange theory (Cohen and Keren, 2008), is that the satisfaction that employees experience with their job situation might make them so grateful that they decide to 'give back' by undertaking voluntary helping behaviours, from which their employer can indirectly benefit (Cohen and Keren, 2008). In contrast, employees who are not satisfied with their job likely prefer to conserve their personal energy for activities that give them immediate returns, rather than engaging in extra-role activities (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). Discretionary helping activities require significant energy from employees, which they otherwise could apply to meet their formal job obligations (Koopman et al., 2016). This challenge might be more pronounced to the extent that employees have a general sense of unhappiness about their

job situation, because they lack the energy or drive to attend to co-worker issues on a voluntary basis, over and beyond their formal job duties (Quinn et al., 2012).

In addition, the positive effect of job satisfaction on helping behaviour is stronger when employees have access to complementary resources that make positive job energy allocations to this behaviour more enticing. These invigorating effects align with the COR argument about resource gain spirals, such that the expected value of allocating personal energy resources to spur further resource gains, through helping behaviours, increases in circumstances in which these behaviours appear desirable (Hobfoll, 2001). Combining the performance of regular job duties with extra-role helping activities can be challenging, so employees might perceive too much risk associated with spending significant time to help co-workers resolve their problems and succeed in their jobs (Bergeron, 2007; Bolino et al., 2015). But this challenge is mitigated to the extent that employees (1) have a strong sense that their work efforts are important and meaningful, (2) are willing to subordinate their individual interests for the collective or common good, and (3) feel supported and protected by their organization.

Notably, our theoretical focus on the invigorating effects of employees' resource access centres around the *incremental* contributions of job satisfaction, such that the study's key contribution pertains to the *triggering* role of employees' access to complementary resources in channelling their happy job feelings toward helping others. Empirically, this issue is evident in the slope differences at different levels of resources. The interaction plots in Figures 2–4, and the corresponding simple slope analysis, show that increasing levels of job satisfaction do *not* significantly increase helping behaviours when employees have a sense that their job activities are unimportant, do not give significant weight to collective or group goals, and perceive that the organization does not care for their well-being. Even if employees' job satisfaction has the

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potential to spur their extra-role helping activities, the fear that such behaviour may undermine

the successful accomplishment of their regular job tasks may make them sceptical about

adopting these activities, in the absence of other relevant resources.

Overall, by extending insights into when job satisfaction is more likely to increase the

likelihood that employees perform helping behaviours voluntarily—namely, when they can draw

from complementary resources that fuel their motivation to allocate positive job energy to

activities from which co-workers and the organization can benefit—this study pinpoints the

indirect beneficial roles of the three factors, moving beyond research that focuses primarily on

their direct enabling roles (e.g., Shen et al., 2014; Uçanok and Karabati, 2013; Van Dyne et al.,

2000). Employees' access to relevant resources, held personally or residing in the organizational

context, triggers the allocation of their positive job energy to helping behaviours when these

resources enable the achievement of even more resource gains by undertaking the behaviours

(Hobfoll, 2001, 2011).

Practical implications

This study offers important insights for practitioners. The findings emphasize the

challenge that organizational decision makers interested in stimulating voluntary helping

behaviours encounter when their employees feel unhappy. If they are frustrated with their job

situation, employees may lack the motivation or stamina to go out of their way to undertake

work activities that extend their formal job descriptions; organizations accordingly should seek

to diminish the occurrence of such unhappy feelings. A challenge in this regard is that some

employees may be reluctant to admit that they are unhappy with their current work situation,

perhaps because they do not want to appear overly vulnerable or complaining. Organizations

should be proactive and take the initiative to detect which circumstances make employees

unhappy and analyse the sources of such feelings (e.g., excessive workloads, unmet job expectations, exposure to stressful leadership).

They also could make employees more aware of *others'* frustrations and promote communication channels that bring these negative feelings to the surface. For example, targeted training efforts could stimulate the development of open knowledge-sharing routines that enable employees to vent their frustrations about their current job situation (Wang and Noe, 2010). Training efforts that prompt employees to detect and acknowledge dissatisfaction in themselves or others could include formal programs or informal learning methods, all of which represent valuable employee development options (Enos et al., 2003). Together, these training efforts can enhance organizational effectiveness to the extent that organizational leaders can build and maintain a culture that makes discussions about unhappiness, and its sources, acceptable.

Perhaps the most interesting insight that emerges from this study though is that the existence of happy feelings about a job situation is not a guarantee of voluntary work behaviours. When employees take a significant amount of time to assist their colleagues in resolving problem situations or doing their jobs more effectively, particularly on a voluntary basis, they run the risk of not being able to meet their own formal job duties (Bergeron, 2007). The current study shows that employees who can rely on relevant resources—a sense of meaningfulness about their work, an orientation that gives precedence to collective over individual interests, and relentless organizational support for employee well-being—are better positioned to channel the positive feelings that they experience about their job situation into actual behaviours that make a difference to co-workers. Organizational leaders interested in encouraging voluntary helping activities thus should (1) stimulate the intrinsic motivation of their employees and make them aware of the importance of their job activities, (2) emphasize the usefulness of group goals and

harmony over the pursuit of individual interests, and (3) provide active support, such that employees sense that their employer truly cares about their opinions and goals. Ultimately, these measures can make organizations more effective in reducing the fear among their employees that allocating their positive job energy to voluntary work behaviours will not automatically compromise their ability to perform their regular job tasks adequately.

Limitations and future research

This study has some shortcomings, which suggest research opportunities. First, the investigation centres on how job satisfaction spurs helping behaviour, instead of the reverse process whereby undertaking helping behaviours may be a source of satisfaction for employees: when employees believe that they can make a difference and assist their colleagues in becoming more successful, their excitement about these contributions could make them feel happier about their work situation (Hoption, 2016; Organ, 1988). Beyond the time lag of three weeks between the assessment of the predictor variable (job satisfaction) and dependent variable (helping behaviour), longitudinal research designs could explicitly investigate the long-term, causal processes that connect higher levels of job satisfaction with helping behaviours. In a related vein, the relationship between job satisfaction and helping behaviour might be explained by the resource gains anticipated from the allocation of positive job energy to these activities (e.g., feeling of making a difference, reciprocity, indirect appreciation by the employer), but we did not measure these mechanisms directly. Further research could investigate which of these mechanisms might be most prominent. Similarly, we argued that employees may expect resource gains from their helping behaviours, such as a sense of personal accomplishment (Lemoine et al., 2015) or reciprocity from co-workers (Hui et al., 2000). A logical extension of this study would be to measure these resource gains explicitly, as well as investigate other possible performance-

related outcomes, such as the ability to establish effective dynamics of help seeking and giving (Hargadon and Bechky, 2006) or create intra-organizational micro-social systems that facilitate the generation and exploitation of creative ideas (Cirella, 2016).

Second, the focus on two specific personal factors (work meaningfulness, collectivistic orientation) that function as triggers of the relationship between job satisfaction and helping behaviour excludes alternative factors, such as a proactive personality (Li et al., 2010), prosocial motives (Choi and Moon, 2016), tenacity (Baum and Locke, 2004), or self-efficacy (Chen and Kao, 2011), that also might exert effects. Additional studies could assess the invigorating roles of other contextual factors too, beyond perceptions of organizational support, such as fair decision-making processes (Karriker and Williams, 2009), transformational leadership (Zhu and Akhtar, 2014), or adequate performance appraisal systems (Zheng et al., 2012).

Third, this study's theoretical arguments were not industry-specific, but it could be interesting to consider the potential impact of relevant industry factors, such as the level of competition that organizations encounter (Porter, 1996). Such competitive rivalry might make employees more eager to apply their job-related energy to positive work behaviours from which their organization could benefit (Lahiri et al., 2008) and also enhance the invigorating roles of valuable complementary resources in the allocation of positive job energy to voluntary helping behaviours. Future research could test the conceptual framework across different industries.

Fourth, the theoretical arguments were culturally independent, but cultural factors might play a role. For example, Pakistani culture is characterized by a tendency of its people to emphasize group over individual goals (Hofstede, 2001), such that the relative usefulness of employees' collectivistic orientation may be stronger in the current study context than it would be in more individualistic countries. Cross-country comparisons could assess the relative

importance of employees' positive job energy for spurring their helping behaviours, as well as the prominence of different underlying moderators in this process, in different cultural contexts. Moreover, the sample included only male employees, reflecting the empirical context (front-end sales in a male-dominated culture). The theorizing was not gender specific, and the *nature* of the results should be similar for male and female employees. However, continued studies might compare the relative strength of the hypothesized effects for male versus female employees, as well as investigate gender effects at the macro-level, such as whether the connection between job satisfaction and helping behaviour depends on whether the country culture emphasizes feminine values (e.g., caring for others, providing social support; Hofstede, 2001).

Conclusion

With a basis in COR theory, this study has investigated the roles of job satisfaction and selected contingency factors for explaining helping behaviour. The findings show that positive energy stemming from their current job situation fuels employees' propensity to go out of their way to help their co-workers voluntarily, and this effect is particularly strong to the extent that employees can rely on valuable resources, whether personally held (work meaningfulness, collectivistic orientation) or embedded in the organizational context (perceptions of organizational support). These resources spur employees' helping behaviour indirectly by activating their willingness to turn their happiness about their job situation into activities that contribute to the well-being of other organizational members. Ideally, these insights will function as a platform for continued investigations of how organizations can promote voluntary helping behaviours among their employees, by combining and leveraging their valuable resource bases.

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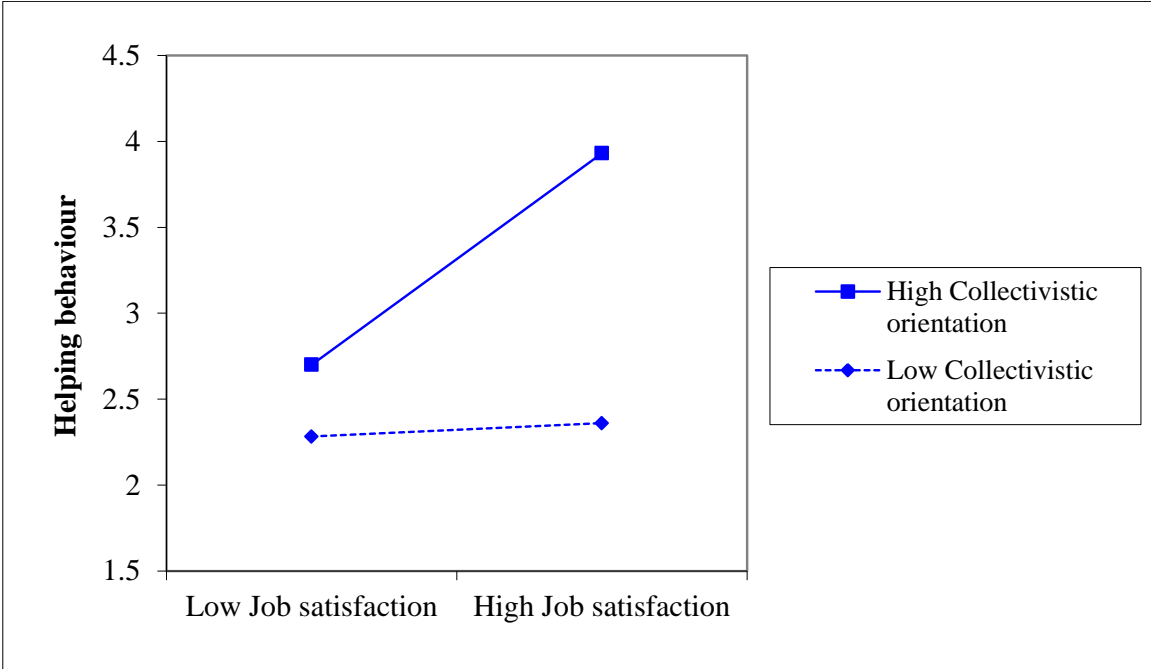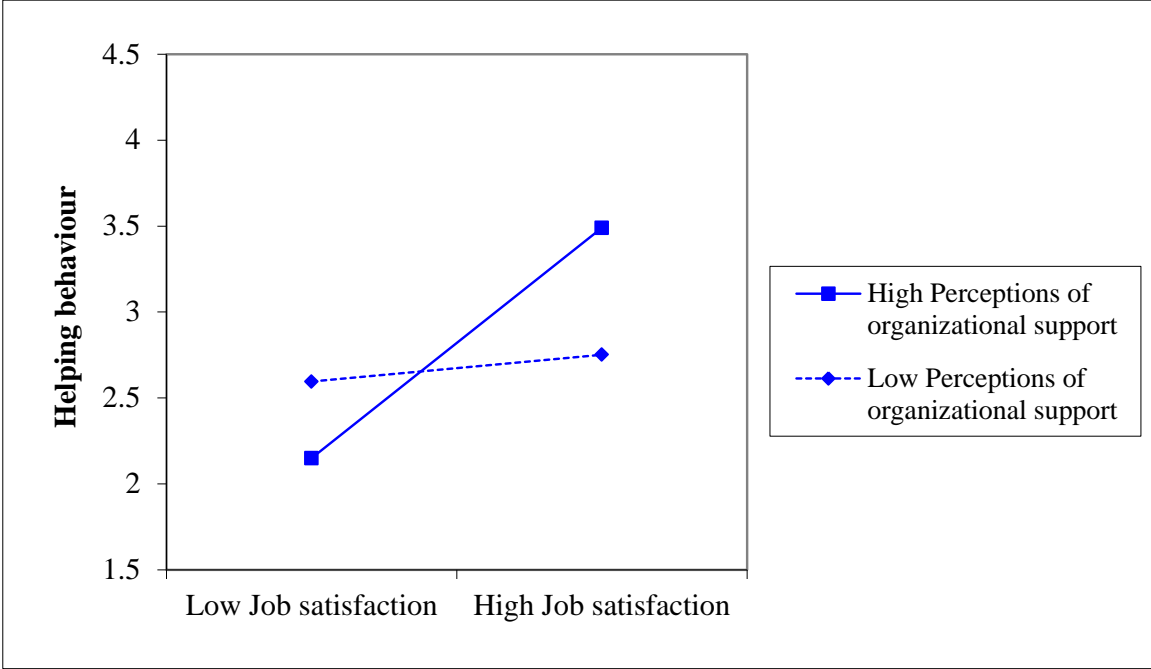
Figure 1: Conceptual model
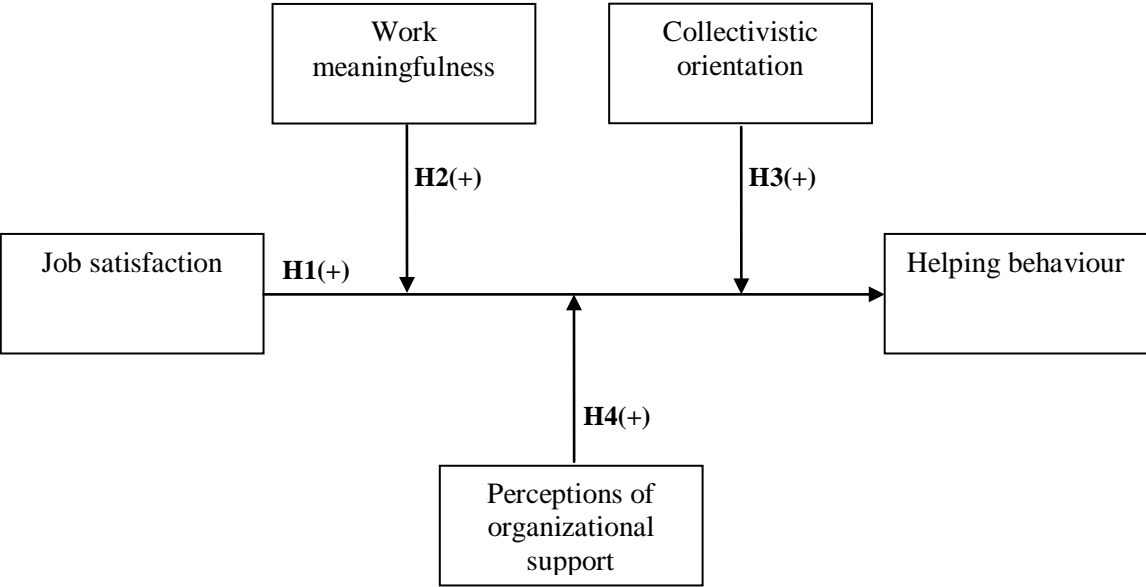
Figure 2: Work meaningfulness on the job satisfaction–helping behaviour relationship
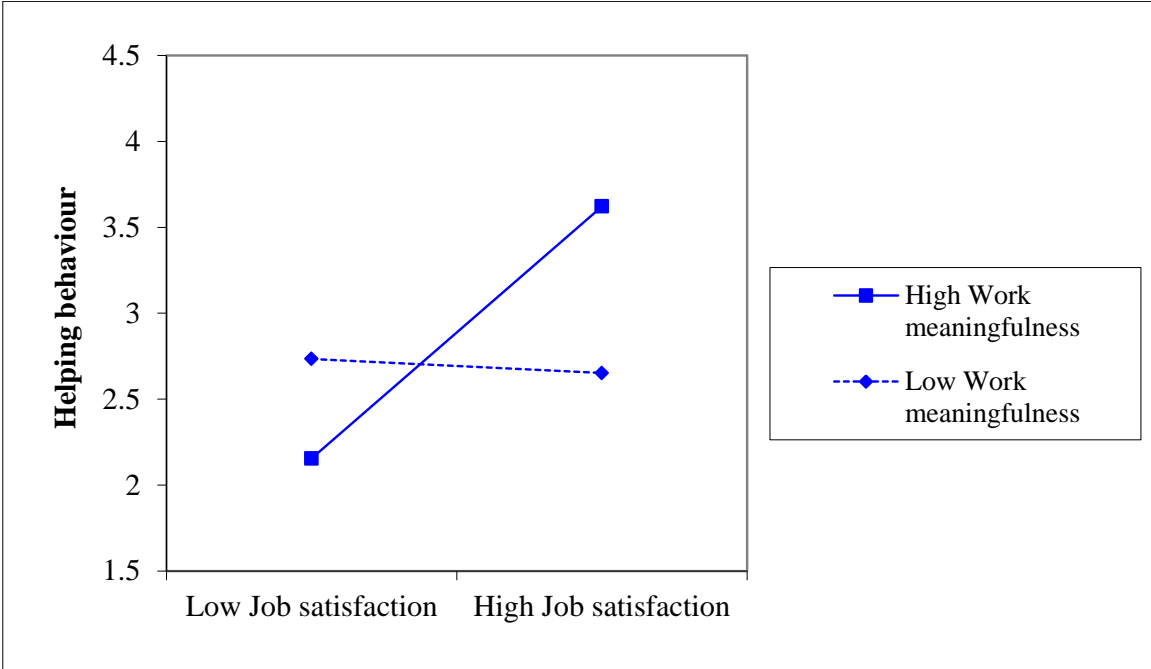
Figure 3: Collectivistic orientation on the job satisfaction–helping behaviour relationship

Figure 4: Perceptions of organizational support on the job satisfaction–helping behaviour relationship

Table 1: Correlation table and descriptive statistics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Helping behaviour							
2. Job satisfaction	.408**						
3. Work meaningfulness	.236**	.439**					
4. Collectivistic orientation	.322**	.409**	.521**				
5. Perceptions of organizational support	.192**	.401**	.450**	.348**			
6. Education	-.041	-.219**	-.072	-.064	-.145*		
7. Organizational tenure	.064	.116	.051	.069	-.020	.131	
Mean	3.897	3.943	4.460	4.431	5.771	.292	1.262
Standard deviation	.818	.911	.439	.452	1.028	.456	.627

Notes: N = 202.

$**p < .01$; $*p < .05$.

Table 2: Regression results (dependent variable: helping behaviour)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Education	-.091	.069	.013	.040	-.004
Organizational tenure	.092	.017	.016	.002	.020
H_1: Job satisfaction		.303***	.346***	.327***	.374***
Work meaningfulness		-.016	.098	-.010	.068
Collectivistic orientation		.390*	.416*	.497**	.440**
Perceptions of organizational support		-.005	.012	.000	.073
H_2: Job satisfaction × Work meaningfulness			.387***		
H_3: Job satisfaction × Collectivistic orientation				.288*	
H_4: Job satisfaction × Perceptions of organizational support					.296***
R^2	.007	.193	.235	.208	.315
R^2 change		.186***	.042***	.015*	.122***

Notes: N = 202; unstandardized coefficients (two-tailed p-values).
**$p < .01$; *$p < .05$; +$p < .1$.