
Actual Role of Groups of Determinants on Job Satisfaction in a Rapidly Changing Environment in Poland and in Italy

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Abstract:

Purpose: The article attempts to explore the perceptions of employees from Poland and Italy towards attitude to change and groups of job satisfaction determinants and to diagnose the influence of actual perceptions of the organizational environment as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambivalent (in the VUCA concept) and brittle, anxious, non-linear, and incomprehensible (in the BANI concept) on job satisfaction groups of determinants among Polish and Italian employees. The present paper employs the results of research conducted by the same author.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study was conducted in 2023 on a random sample of 326 adult employees in Poland and Italy. The method used in the study was CAWI. The Likert scale mostly used in the questionnaires allowed the participants to give an answer on a five-point scale. Three hypotheses were developed to be verified by the research conducted.

Findings: A thorough analysis of the literature on the topic and the conducted research demonstrate a significant correlation between changeable environmental characteristics and groups of determinants of job satisfaction. There appears to be a tendency toward considering changes as opportunities that might provide employees with new advantages and opportunities. Moreover, Employer Sustainability Activities in ESG start to represent a significant new group of factors influencing job satisfaction.

Practical Implications: The research results can have practical implications for managers and owners of companies in Poland and Italy because they provide important configurations of actual groups of factors that lead to employee job satisfaction. Having that in mind, managers would influence the implementation of changes more effectively and boldly.

Originality/value: This study broadens scholarly knowledge about the connection between change, sustainability, and groups of determinants and their effects on employees' job satisfaction outcomes. A set of variables that affect job satisfaction in groups of determinants in a turbulent environment characterized by VUCA and BANI concepts was identified, and the strength of influence between variables was shown.

Keywords: Job satisfaction, employees' attitudes, change, VUCA, BANI, sustainability, ESG,

JEL classification: J28, N30, Q56.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, the business environment is becoming more complex and full of changes and chaos. Changes that we can observe affect the functioning of all companies. In these times, in order to enable companies not only to survive but also to develop, it is important to recognize the current expectations of employees.

In these circumstances, named by e.g., VUCA and BANI, a basic condition for the survival of any organization is to respond to the modern needs of the changing environment for the employees, and it is crucial to properly shape the professional satisfaction of the employees.

One of the most important features of the external environment nowadays is the intensification of changes and their influence on employee job satisfaction and effectiveness. As a result of the pandemic, organizations and the teams that make them up have undergone a number of transformations. Regarding remote work and reducing social interactions, there are several trends and difficulties to be aware of. Leaders are expected to lay out a plan and offer direction on what to anticipate and how to go forward, which has a direct impact on the employees job satisfaction (Lemieszkiewicz, 2022).

Recent management research demonstrates a growing interest in and indicates the significance of the ability of a company to adapt and change the way it does business, enhance staff competencies, and continuously adapt technology in its day-to-day business operations (Nguyen and Tuan, 2022). To make continuous improvements in employees' job satisfaction, it is crucial to adapt to a new, unexpected environment using different groups of determinants.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the perceptions of employees from Poland and Italy towards attitude to change and groups of job satisfaction determinants in certain time periods: until 2019, in 2020-2022 (including the COVID-19 pandemic and the start of the war in Ukraine), and in 2023-2025.

Moreover, the article shows also opinions on to what extent respondents assess the current business reality as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambivalent (in the VUCA concept) and brittle, anxious, non-linear, and incomprehensible (in the BANI concept), and to what extent they assess being prepared and having the right competences (knowledge and skills) at their current employer to face the business reality and the impact of their work position on job satisfaction.

On the basis of the research, indications of specific solutions for efficient and effective employee management as a result of intensifying the impact of changes on employees' job satisfaction will be developed (Norena-Chavez and Thalassinou, 2022a; 2022b).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Job Satisfaction

Employees play a critical role in any organization, since without them, it would be impossible for it to accomplish its objectives. Human resources are capital in any organization, and human resource management is one of the management areas influenced by the changes related to digital transformation and COVID-19. Nowadays, increasing employees' job satisfaction is a primary objective.

According to Locke (1976), job satisfaction is a pleasant emotional state resulting from an individual's perception of his or her job as realizing or enabling the realization of significant values available at work, provided that these values coincide with their needs.

Job satisfaction is a global concept and is characterized by satisfaction with different aspects of an employee's job. It is realized when an individual's affective assessment of his or her work implies that the organization is fulfilling the required needs and anticipations (Ashari *et al.*, 2021; Weiss, 2002).

One of the employers' business goals should be to appropriately verify those factors that influence job satisfaction (Kaczkowska-Serafińska, 2013). Work per se is both a means to achieve benefits and a value in and of itself, which makes it possible to satisfy numerous career-related needs (Kozioł, 2002). It is also pointed out that job satisfaction increases self-esteem and allows for the fulfillment of higher-level needs for every single employee (Juchnowicz, 2010).

Analysis of employees current expectations regarding specific groups of factors plays an important role in determining organizational identification (Sun *et al.*, 2021), organizational commitment (Ilyash *et al.*, 2019), job satisfaction (Akpınar *et al.*, 2013), and full commitment and raising employees' productivity (Rosnee *et al.*, 2021).

Working conditions, work-life balance, remuneration, job content, professional development opportunities, relationships with coworkers, and relationships with the supervisor are the seven groups of determinants that the author of this article found to have the greatest influence over job satisfaction and employee engagement over the past ten years of research and practical activity (Kaczkowska-Serafińska, 2013).

It is therefore extremely important to identify the needs of one's employees in terms of their dream job so that individual organizations can fulfill them, thus contributing to their job satisfaction, which will further translate into the quality of service provided and their loyalty towards the employer.

As a result of a supportive environment, encouragement, and management style, staff members feel like partners in the organization, get more satisfaction from their work, and have a stronger sense of ownership over the outcomes. There should be no doubt that competitive advantage can result from satisfied employees adding value to their work and the company as a whole. Despite initiated research in this area, it constitutes an empirically poorly understood area (Gębczyńska, 2022; Douglas *et al.*, 2020).

2.2 The VUCA and BANI Concept as an Attempt to Name and Understand the Rapidly Changing World

One of the key characteristics of the modern environment is the speed with which changes are made, especially technological ones. Indeed, in modern societies, rapid and unexpected changes affect the daily lives of employees and determine to a significant extent their job and life satisfaction (Chras *et al.*, 2022). Remote work that gives appropriate advantages for employees and its perception have rapidly changed (Al-Habaibeh *et al.*, 2021; Aloisi and De Stefano, 2022).

At the employee level, potential benefits included higher job satisfaction due to increased flexibility in managing place, time, and method of transportation, as well as better productivity due to working in a setting with fewer interruptions (Pamula and Zalewska-Turzyńska, 2023).

The scientific literature has provided increasing evidence of the psychological impact of changes on society (Rajkumar, 2020; Hossain *et al.*, 2020; Ma *et al.*, 2020) and also of the reduction of positive experiences such as work engagement or job satisfaction (Magro *et al.*, 2022).

The introduction of VUCA was made by lecturers at the United States Army War College in response to changes and implications in the preparation of military commanders in the 1990s (Minciu, Berar, and Dobrea 2020).

This situation resulted in the terminology and use of the acronym, which quickly evolved and found reference in business, especially after the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, in New York. And then, managers proposed an accessible and understandable way to define a chaotic and constantly changing business environment using the VUCA environment (Judek, 2020).

In December 2019, a new virus called SARS-CoV-2 appeared, and the disease it produced was named COVID-19. The COVID-19 post-pandemic scenario and the unstable international war situation are still having an impact on business today. The four fundamental components of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity are given new significance by the acronym VUCA (Macpherson, 2022; Mack, 2016).

However, when a crisis (such as a pandemic or a change in the climate) occurs, the business environment becomes chaotic and extremely difficult to predict in terms of how businesses and their personnel will behave. Cascio J. asserted that current ideas like VUCA are inappropriate for a world that is rapidly evolving and proposed the new concept of BANI because the world has never been more Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, and Incomprehensible (Fedchenko *et al.*, 2022; de Godo and Ribas Filho, 2021).

In this case, the author has decided to verify, during conducting research in 2023, to what extent employees in Poland and Italy assess the current business reality both in a VUCA and a BANI manner and to what extent they are prepared and have the right competences at their current employer to face the business reality.

3. Research Methodology

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, many changes have taken place in the area of employee satisfaction. Remote or hybrid work has already permanently replaced traditional office work, which has greatly changed the behavior and expectations of employees in the area of work-life balance. Such rapidly changing business and organizational conditions have radically changed the employees' approach to change.

On the other hand, factors related to relations with colleagues or superiors have acquired a completely different meaning and expect communication channels from both parties. In addition, employees' awareness of sustainable development and actions taken by employers in the areas of environmental, social, and organizational governance has increased. For this purpose, a survey was conducted focusing on employees in Poland and Italy.

The research methodology includes an analysis of academic literature, publications in scientific journals, and online sources, in addition to a bibliographic review. Furthermore, it was established to perform primary research utilizing a quantitative approach and a structured questionnaire as a research tool.

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect reliable data on a five-point Likert scale (one = strongly disagree, two = disagree, three = difficult to decide, four = agree, and five = strongly agree). The survey classified responses from Italian and Polish respondents on job satisfaction, attitudes toward the organization's environment, and possible actual determinants. The questionnaire was divided into five sections.

The first section consisted of attitudes toward change in certain time periods (such as before 2019, 2020-2022, and 2023-2025) and how employees assess the current business reality and the level of being prepared and having the right competences to face the business reality.

The second part was dedicated to analyzing the main groups of factors influencing job satisfaction at specific time intervals, while the third section consisted of actual groups of detailed factors influencing job satisfaction.

The fourth part collected summary data (such as attitudes towards working in the current company and level of working with passion), and the fifth consisted of demographic questions. Mostly, each section consisted of Likert scale items about the research factors, so it was possible to calculate the correlation between different factors to verify the potential and actual relationship between them.

It is retrospective observational cohort research conducted using the CAWI method (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) from March 2023 to June 2023. The study group consisted of 326 professionally active employees in Poland (173) and Italy (153) in managerial and operational positions. Due to the possibility of significant differences in results, respondents were divided into two particularities: Polish and Italian employees.

These employees volunteered to participate in the study. Two participants from Italy were removed from the data analysis due to errors in completing the form. Inclusion criteria for the study are: (1) willingness to participate in the study; (2) professionally active employees; (3) work in Poland or Italy.

Stata – version 9.1, PSPP, and Microsoft Excel (version 2013) were used for data analysis. The relationships between variables were tested using Spearman's rho, and the level of significance in all calculations was assumed to be $p < 0.05$.

The analysis included factors affecting job satisfaction, that were assessed using seven groups of determinants adapted from previous studies (Kaczkowska-Serafińska, 2013) and also the possible influence of ESG actions conducted by companies (Kaczkowska-Serafińska, 2022). To avoid biases in the study, the authors used standardized scales that had already been used to collect information online.

The survey was supervised in Poland and Italy, and in case of doubts among the respondents, questions were corrected to fill any doubts that appeared because the questionnaires were in two languages: Polish and Italian.

The author developed an empirical framework by stating three hypotheses based on the literature review and devoted research results given below:

H1: Attitudes to change have been developed in the same manner in both Polish and Italian research groups.

H2: Changeable environments affect job satisfaction in both Polish and Italian research groups.

H3: Employer Sustainability Activities in ESG start to affect job satisfaction and life satisfaction in both Polish and Italian research groups.

4. Research Results and Discussion

Finally, 326 respondents were included, consisting of 131 women (40%) and 178 men (55%); 13 preferred not to answer (4%); and 4 were not defined (1%). The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 62. 57 employees were in managerial positions (17%) and 269 in operational positions (83%).

Similar compositions characterized the Polish (18% managerial and 82% operational) and Italian research groups (16% managerial and 84% operational). 180 of the total respondents (55%) took up work in medium-sized and big companies that employ more than 50 employees in the Polish research group (54%), and in the Italian research group (56%).

Italian respondents mainly see the current business reality as volatile, brittle, anxious, uncertain, non-linear, ambivalent, complex, and, least of all, incomprehensible (Table 1). Among Polish respondents, there is no such unanimity in the perception of the business environment.

The great majority of respondents in both the Polish (61%) and Italian (80%) research groups believe that they are prepared and have the necessary skills at their present company to meet the current challenges of a changing world. Polish employees, to a lesser extent than Italian employees, see those taking part in the survey, which is why they believe to a greater extent that they are prepared for the changing reality. This may be due to the specificity of employees of Italian and Polish companies and the consequences of the changes faced by employees in these two countries in post-pandemic times.

Table 1. Respondents' average answers to the questions regarding assessing the current business reality in terms of VUCA and BANI characteristics and being prepared to face the business reality.

	Italy		Poland	
	strongly agree (5) + agree (4)	strongly disagree (1) + disagree (2)	strongly agree (5) + agree (4)	strongly disagree (1) + disagree (2)
brittle	65%	11%	27%	39%
anxious	65%	13%	32%	43%
non-linear	64%	8%	34%	33%
incomprehensible	45%	28%	31%	47%
volatile	68%	11%	40%	37%
uncertain	64%	16%	44%	29%
complex	62%	12%	51%	17%
ambivalent	63%	14%	48%	27%
being prepared to face the business reality	61%	9%	80%	5%

Source: Author's calculations.

Taking into account the percentage of responses that were and are attitudes and perceptions of change, generally speaking, the opinions among both research groups were quite similar (table 2). Before 2019, respondents were negative about changes (IT 59%, PL 53%) and did not see the need to make changes if something worked well (IT 72%, PL 69%).

In the years 2020–2022, including COVID and the war in Ukraine, both research groups showed similarity in the perception of changes as unavoidable realities (IT 67%, PL 77%), but every second Italian respondent believed that it would definitely get better (50%), while every second Polish employee showed fear of what the change would bring (PL 55%).

Currently, in 2023, both research groups show unanimity in receiving changes, which has changed dramatically compared to 2019. Currently, changes are considered as a chance to prove yourself (IT 59%, IT 61%); changes give them the opportunity to use their strengths and/or develop weaknesses (IT 60%, PL 56%); and turbulent business reality is considered an intriguing future (IT 61%, PL 57%).

Table 2. Respondents' average answers to the question "What does the change signify in selected time periods (multiple-choice question)?"

	Italy			Poland		
	till 2019	2020-2022	2023-2025	till 2019	2020-2022	2023-2025
an intriguing future	48%	12%	61%	31%	23%	57%
unavoidable reality	24%	67%	35%	13%	77%	14%
it will definitely get better	25%	50%	44%	23%	40%	50%
change is a risk that gives me the strength to act	41%	33%	52%	23%	43%	44%
a chance to prove yourself	40%	41%	59%	29%	28%	61%
why change if something is good?	72%	20%	19%	69%	19%	15%
I don't like change	59%	41%	10%	53%	39%	19%
I am always afraid of what the "new" will bring	56%	30%	24%	31%	55%	26%
it gives me the opportunity to use my strengths and/or develop weaknesses	37%	39%	60%	21%	40%	56%

Source: Author's calculations.

When it is known what the current perception of changes is and how it has changed over the years among the Polish and Italian research groups, we can refer to the results of the relationship between the groups of researched factors and job satisfaction among respondents.

In Table 3, the results of the correlations are shown regarding the Polish and Italian groups of respondents. Spearman's rank correlation was computed to assess the

Work-life balance	r =	0,33	0,25	0,14	0,15	0,07	0,10	0,16	0,04
	p =	0,000	0,000	0,083	0,071	0,352	0,203	0,035	0,604
Remuneration	r =	0,25	0,20	0,19	0,14	0,14	0,19	0,21	0,02
	p =	0,002	0,014	0,019	0,090	0,068	0,012	0,006	0,833
Working conditions	r =	0,30	0,23	0,12	0,18	0,09	0,24	0,19	0,01
	p =	0,000	0,004	0,148	0,025	0,243	0,002	0,014	0,880
Contents of the work	r =	0,32	0,22	0,17	0,29	0,10	0,24	0,13	0,10
	p =	0,000	0,006	0,039	0,000	0,202	0,001	0,082	0,198
Professional development opportunities	r =	0,27	0,18	0,25	0,30	0,15	0,27	0,20	0,08
	p =	0,001	0,029	0,002	0,000	0,053	0,000	0,007	0,279
Relationship with colleagues	r =	0,20	0,17	0,12	0,21	0,01	0,14	0,14	0,06
	p =	0,015	0,038	0,154	0,009	0,921	0,069	0,060	0,398
Relationship with supervisor	r =	0,38	0,31	0,27	0,25	0,14	0,22	0,24	0,18
	p =	0,000	0,000	0,001	0,002	0,063	0,004	0,002	0,016
Employer Sustainability Activities (ESG: Environmental, Social, Corporate Governance)	r =	0,32	0,26	0,12	0,28	0,11	0,17	0,21	0,07
	p =	0,000	0,001	0,139	0,001	0,135	0,023	0,006	0,330
Work position	r =	0,04	0,06	0,10	0,20	0,16	0,16	0,28	0,34
	p =	0,594	0,434	0,215	0,014	0,036	0,031	0,000	0,000

Source: Author's calculations.

Analyzing the influence of the characteristics of the business environment and the groups of job satisfaction determinants, differences are observed among the Polish and Italian results obtained from the research (Table 4).

The Italian research group is mostly influenced by the perception of business activity as incomprehensible (6 out of 8 groups of factors) and anxious (5 out of 8 groups of factors). In comparison, the Polish research group is under the influence of complex (7 out of 8 groups of factors) and ambivalent (5 out of 8 groups of factors) characteristics of the organizational environment.

The study also identified a positive relationship between perceiving the environment as complex, ambivalent, and non-linear and the majority of analyzed groups of determinants of job satisfaction in the Polish research group, but a negative relationship between perceiving the environment as anxious and incomprehensible in the Italian research group.

Table 4. Results of Correlations Analyses

	Business environment characteristics	Work-life balance	Remuneration	Working conditions	Content of the work	Professional development opportunities	Relationship with colleagues	Relationship with supervisor	Employer Sustainability Activities (ESG)
Italy	brittle	-0,07	-0,12	-0,11	-0,20	-0,21	-0,17	-0,13	-0,04
	anxious	-0,15	-0,15	-0,20	-0,23	-0,32	-0,22	-0,16	-0,13
	non-linear	-0,04	-0,08	-0,11	-0,22	-0,15	-0,16	-0,06	-0,08
	incomprehensible	-0,12	-0,18	-0,21	-0,24	-0,30	-0,17	-0,20	-0,13
	volatile	0,04	0,04	0,03	-0,06	-0,07	-0,04	0,01	-0,01
	uncertain	-0,06	-0,12	-0,10	-0,15	-0,21	-0,10	-0,03	-0,11
	complex	-0,01	-0,03	-0,07	-0,11	-0,15	-0,12	-0,03	-0,06
	ambivalent	-0,04	-0,05	-0,10	-0,17	-0,19	-0,10	-0,11	-0,16
	being prepared to face the business reality	0,18	0,13	0,14	0,22	0,15	0,14	0,18	0,21
Poland	brittle	0,09	0,01	0,07	0,07	0,04	0,10	0,09	0,21
	anxious	0,22	0,10	0,17	0,09	0,14	0,14	0,12	0,14
	non-linear	0,10	0,08	0,10	0,21	0,16	0,17	0,18	0,22
	incomprehensible	0,07	-0,08	-0,05	0,02	-0,05	0,00	0,00	0,04
	volatile	0,16	0,03	0,07	0,06	0,11	0,22	0,11	0,13
	uncertain	0,06	0,10	0,09	0,12	0,05	0,10	0,10	0,10
	complex	0,28	0,16	0,22	0,25	0,26	0,21	0,14	0,29
	ambivalent	0,11	0,12	0,10	0,20	0,23	0,22	0,24	0,23
	being prepared to face the business reality	0,08	0,13	0,09	0,11	0,15	0,07	0,09	0,13

Note: Each blue box means $p < 0.05$.

Source: Author's calculations.

The more Polish employees perceive the business environment as complex, the greater impact Employer Sustainability ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$), work-life balance ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$), professional development opportunities ($r = 0.26$, $p = 0.001$) content of work ($r = 0.25$, $p = 0.001$) working conditions ($r = 0.22$, $p = 0.003$), relationships with colleagues ($r = 0.21$, $p = 0.006$) and remuneration ($r = 0.16$, $p = 0.033$) can have on their job satisfaction.

On the other hand, negative correlations were observed among the Italian respondents between the perception of the reality of the company's operation as incomprehensible and professional development opportunities ($r = -0.30$, $p < 0.001$),

content of the work ($r = -0.24$, $p = 0.003$), working conditions ($r = -0.21$, $p = 0.011$), relationship with supervisor ($r = -0.20$, $p = 0.015$), relationships with colleagues ($r = -0.17$, $p = 0.031$) and remuneration ($r = -0.18$, $p = 0.024$).

5. Conclusions, Proposals, Recommendations

This study showed the presence of influence of changes in job satisfaction determinants in the Polish and Italian study groups. The obtained data indicate empirical support for the author's hypotheses.

H1: Attitudes to change have been developed in the same manner in both Polish and Italian research groups.

In this empirical study, attitudes toward the change were analyzed among Polish and Italian employees in the direct time frame: till 2019, 2020-2022, and from 2023. Before 2019, respondents were negative about changes. In the period 2020-2022, including COVID and the war in Ukraine, people perceived the changes as unavoidable realities, and nowadays, in 2023, the perception of the change is positive and considered a chance and opportunity (Table 2). As a confirmation of Hypothesis 1, these trends are similar among the Polish and Italian groups of employees.

H2: Changeable environments affect job satisfaction in both Polish and Italian research groups.

This study confirms Hypothesis 2, that a changeable environment characterized by VUCA and BANI concept variables can lead to higher employee job satisfaction in Poland and Italy. However, differences appeared among Polish and Italian group of respondents.

Among Poland respondents, a higher level of perceiving the environment as complex, non-linear, and ambivalent was associated with a greater relationship with most of the job satisfaction groups of determinants. In comparison to the Italian research group, where the higher level of perceiving the environment as incomprehensible and anxious was associated with a lower relationship with most of the job satisfaction groups of determinants (Table 4).

H3: Employer Sustainability Activities in ESG start to affect job satisfaction and life satisfaction in both Polish and Italian research groups.

Conducted research confirms also Hypothesis 3 regarding the existing impact of activities taken by the employer regarding sustainability ESG aspects on the environment, social, and corporate governance. It is interesting that among Italian respondents, there is an observed positive relationship between Employer Sustainability activities and job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and doing a job with

passion. However, for Polish respondents, it is also a confirmed positive relationship, but with satisfaction from the workplace and life satisfaction (Table 3).

Moreover, it has been revealed in this study that the majority of the employees surveyed in Poland and Italy reported that nowadays they perceive mostly advantages and possibilities that the changes that are sweeping the company where they work can actually benefit them. Employers can greatly benefit from employees who are tailored to rapidly changing environments and are prepared to face business reality.

Managers can make changes in the company much more easily and effectively than they could before 2019. Employees will be more satisfied with their work when they are part of the changes in the company. Attention should also be paid to the employees who are change-driven, because they can be critical future human resource foundations for developing a company in such a turbulent environment.

Another result arising from the study is that employers should provide additional attention to enhance the scope and quantity of initiatives taken to fulfill ESG activities by the company. Perceptions of Employer Sustainability Activities in an ESG manner start to affect employees' job satisfaction and, what is more, their life satisfaction.

6. Limitations of the Study and Further Research

The results of this study should be interpreted with some limitations. Firstly, a semi-random sampling study indicates only some possible results in the studied populations, and the level of occurrence of particular environmental attitudes may significantly differ from that in the studied sample. Secondly, the overall sample size is rather low, which may reduce the generalizability of the results.

Future similar studies should increase the sample size to verify the results obtained in the author's research and be able to generalize the data. Future research should extend the analysis to larger samples and other entities and countries. It would be very interesting to conduct detailed research on the samples according to their age.

In the future, the results should be explored in samples with a more similar representation of employees from the X, Y, and Z generations, so they can give interesting conclusions regarding differences between employees from different generations, especially regarding sustainability activities taken by the Employers.

Despite the limitations mentioned, the described research results can be used by companies, provide additional future research possibilities, and be used as a basis for further studies.

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