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Sustainable Entrepreneurship Project

A case study of Voluntary Employee Green Behavior: The Role of Autonomous Motivation and Organizational Support in Sustainable Practices

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Date: 05/06/2025

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how employees' autonomous motivation influences their Voluntary Employee Green Behavior (VEGB), particularly the initiative to engage in sustainable practices. The research further examines how organizational support can enhance this motivation. The research addresses two questions: (1) What factors influence autonomous motivation of employees to take initiative to engage in sustainability practices as part of Voluntary Employee Green Behavior (VEGB)? and (2) How do employees perceive the role of organizational support in sustaining and enhancing their autonomous motivations to take initiative to engage in sustainable practices? Semi-structured interviews at a case company revealed that employees' autonomous motivation to engage in sustainable practices is primarily driven by personal values, perceived meaning, and peer influence. Organizational authenticity and a supportive corporate culture further enhanced motivation. However, barriers such as time constraints, stress, and limited access, particularly for remote workers, often restricted action despite strong internal motivation. Employees perceived organizational support as fragmented. While employee-led initiatives and inclusive activities fostered engagement, inconsistent leadership, unclear communication, and limited structural guidance weakened the overall impact. The findings highlight the importance of value alignment, visible leadership, and practical, inclusive support in sustaining Voluntary Employee Green Behavior.

Key words: Voluntary Employee Green Behavior (VEGB), Autonomous Motivation, Context Factors, Person Factors, Organizational Factors, Organizational Support, Employee Initiative, Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context and state of the art

Environmental degradation caused by pollution, climate change, and resource depletion intensifies the demand for sustainable business practices (Norton et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2016; Zacher et al., 2023). In response, organizations have implemented a growing number of environmental sustainability practices, often focused on structural, policy-driven, or externally mandated initiatives (Hossain et al., 2024). However, while top-down approaches signal organizational commitment, they do not necessarily translate into sustainability-driven behavior among employees. Sustainability efforts have mainly concentrated on organizational-level strategies, with insufficient attention to how individual employees contribute to or sustain these goals (Kim et al., 2016).

In response to this gap, literature on organizational psychology has increasingly focused on individual-level behaviors that support sustainability within organizations (Zacher et al., 2023). This has led to growing attention to the individual-level foundations of environmental sustainability, especially through Employee Green Behavior (EGB), defined as individual actions in the workplace that contribute to environmental objectives (Ones & Dilchert, 2012; Zacher et al., 2023). Within this literature, Voluntary Employee Green Behavior (VEGB) has gained prominence as a distinct form of EGB, referring to discretionary, self-initiated actions that exceed formal job expectations (Norton et al., 2015; Chaudhary, 2020), including reducing energy consumption, recycling, or avoiding waste production (Zhang et al., 2022). VEGB is typically contrasted with Required Employee Green Behavior, which consists of behaviors mandated by organizational policies or job descriptions (Norton et al., 2015; Chaudhary, 2020; Tian et al., 2020).

Despite its recognized importance, VEGB, and particularly its “*taking initiative*” dimension, remains underexplored in literature (Norton et al., 2015; Tian et al., 2020). While existing research has identified various forms of EGB, the underlying mechanisms driving individuals to move beyond formal job requirements and proactively engage in sustainability initiatives are not fully understood (Francoeur et al., 2021). *Taking initiative* has been repeatedly identified as a core component of VEGB (Ones & Dilchert, 2012; Francoeur et al., 2021), yet few studies have examined how this behavior emerges, or the organizational conditions under which it is likely to occur (Norton et al., 2015).

Growing research points to autonomous motivation, defined as acting out of intrinsic interest or personal values, as a central factor in fostering VEGB (Norton et al., 2015). Unlike REGB, which relies on external regulation, VEGB depends on employees’ internal willingness to engage in sustainability (Chaudhary, 2020). Pro-environmental behavior, closely tied to VEGB (Ones & Dilchert, 2012), is more prominent in organizational contexts when driven by autonomous rather than controlled motivation (Kim et al., 2016). However, while the role of autonomous motivation is increasingly acknowledged, literature provides limited insight into how organizational factors shape autonomous motivation for VEGB specifically (Norton et al., 2015; Xiao et al., 2020).

While some studies have begun to explore VEGB (Xiao et al., 2020), most literature on organizational antecedents to environmental behavior does not explicitly distinguish between required and voluntary actions (Norton et al., 2015). Therefore, the question of how organizational factors (including formal structures, policies, and incentives within the company that influence employee behavior), enables employees to *voluntarily* take initiative in sustainability practices remains largely unanswered (Norton et al., 2015).

This question is particularly salient in the context of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often lack formal sustainability structures and standardized environmental policies (Prasanna et al., 2019; Hossain et al., 2024). SMEs are typically constrained by limited financial and human resources, making it difficult to institutionalize environmental practices (Durrani et al., 2024). In such settings, employee initiative is especially important, as sustainability efforts often depend on informal processes and individual actions rather than formalized systems (Johnstone, 2021). While this study is not limited to SMEs, this context underscores the relevance of examining VEGB, particularly the role of initiative-taking and organizational support, to understand how sustainability behaviors emerge in less formally structured organizational settings.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing on the factors influencing initiative-taking within VEGB and examines how organizational support enhances employees' autonomous motivation. It is guided by the following research questions: (1) What factors influence autonomous motivation of employees to take initiative to engage in sustainability practices as part of Voluntary Employee Green Behavior (VEGB)? and (2) How do employees perceive the role of organizational support in sustaining and enhancing their autonomous motivations to take initiative to engage in sustainable practices?

1.2. Theoretical framework

Norton et al. (2015) recognize that Voluntary Employee Green Behavior (VEGB) is influenced by autonomous motivation, reflecting a sense of self-determination emerging from an intrinsic desire to engage in sustainable practices rather than external pressures or obligations.

Autonomous motivation can be influenced by personal factors that exist at the employee level, conceptualized as two sublevels: between-person and within-person factors. Between-person factors refer to relatively stable characteristics that differ among individuals. These include enduring characteristics including environmental concern, perceived behavioral control, personal norms, intrinsic motivation, task control, and conscientiousness. In contrast, within-person factors are more dynamic and can fluctuate over time or across situations. Examples include motivational states, positive affect, and behavioral intentions, which reflect short-term changes in drive, emotion, and planned behavior (Norton et al., 2015). This aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), positing that in addition to holding positive attitudes toward a behavior, individuals must also recognize their ability to perform the behavior and consider the influence of social norms on their actions.

Norton et al. (2015) posit that next to personal factors, employees motivational state is also shaped by contextual factors beyond their control. In their framework, they identify four contextual levels that impact VEGB: institutional, organizational, leader, and team levels (Norton et al., 2015).

First, the institutional-level influences refer to normative, regulatory, and cognitive-cultural pressures, shaping how employees and organizations interpret the importance of sustainability. For instance, subtle organizational nudges may reflect broader societal and cultural expectations around environmental responsibility (Nielsen & Gamborg, 2024). When these expectations correspond with employees' personal values, they can enhance autonomous motivation. This is in line with Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2012), which

emphasizes that motivation is most effective when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and consistency with their internal values (Shi et al., 2024).

Second, at the organizational level, Norton et al. (2015) identify factors such as internal attitudes including corporate culture, formalized policies, and sustainability-related activities as key contextual influences. While these are often linked to required environmental behaviors, growing research suggests they may also shape autonomous forms of engagement. For instance, value congruence, the degree to which employees perceive alignment between their own sustainability values and those of the organization, are growingly suggested to be a driver of autonomous motivation (Shi et al., 2024; Nurcholis et al., 2025). When employees believe that the organization genuinely shares their environmental values, they are more likely to internalize sustainability goals and act on them voluntarily. Furthermore, the role of authenticity in organizational sustainability efforts, showed that employees are more likely to engage in VEGB when such initiatives are perceived as sincere and integrated into the company's identity, rather than superficial or instrumental (Zhang et al., 2022).

Social Exchange Theory (SET; Bashirun et al., 2019) provides a complementary perspective on organizational support. When employees perceive trust, fairness, and genuine investment in sustainability from their organization, they are more inclined to reciprocate with voluntary behaviors such as VEGB (Bashirun et al., 2019). Although SET emphasizes reciprocal obligation rather than intrinsic values, it aligns with Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2012) in suggesting that a supportive organizational environment can create the psychological conditions under which autonomous motivation is more likely to develop and persist (Shi et al., 2024).

Third, at the leadership level, the behaviors, values, and attitudes of leaders are critical, including the leader's own environmental green behavior, leadership style, and sustainability-related activities. Leaders play a key role in enabling or inhibiting employee motivation by modeling sustainability values and priorities (Norton et al., 2015). Value-driven leadership enhances employees' sensemaking and internalization of sustainability goals, supporting the development of autonomous motivation (Zhang et al., 2023).

Lastly, team-level factors include shared attitudes, behavioral beliefs, social norms, and collective activities related to sustainability. Interpersonal relationships and team dynamics help shape how environmental behavior is enacted in daily work. Peer collaboration, encouragement, and mutual reinforcement at work might foster a sense of collective purpose (Zafar et al., 2025; Nurcholis et al., 2025), thereby supporting autonomous motivation of employees at work and consequently VEGB. These dynamics support the need for relatedness, one of the key psychological needs identified in SDT, contributing to sustaining autonomous motivation for VEGB (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

In this study, the dimension of *taking initiative* as part of VEGB (Ones & Dilchert, 2012; Norton et al., 2015, p. 105) is examined, as current literature has yet to fully explore how this behavior is shaped by autonomous motivation, and influenced by personal and contextual factors. This gap forms the first research question, which investigates the factors that influence employees' autonomous motivation to take initiative in engaging with sustainability practices.

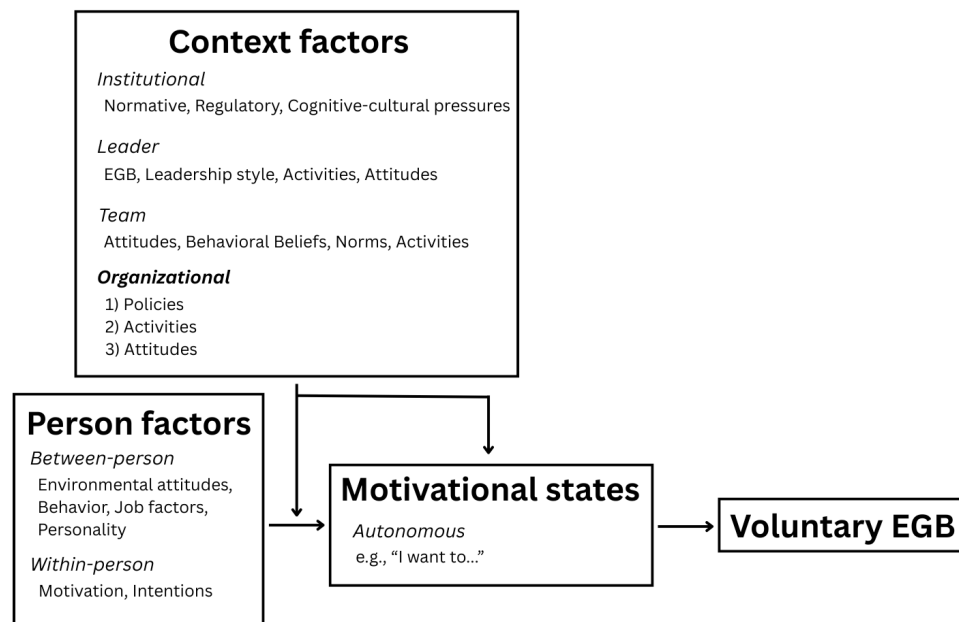
Norton et al. (2015) emphasize the role of personal factors and contextual influences on autonomous motivation. However, they also identify a lack of clarity around how the organizational-level, a specific contextual factor, contributes to fostering autonomous motivation

and, consequently VEGB (Norton et al., 2015; Xiao et al., 2020). Addressing this, the second research question explores how employees perceive the role of organizational support in sustaining and enhancing their autonomous motivation to take initiative in sustainability-related behaviors.

This study draws on the theoretical framework proposed by Norton et al. (2015), which demonstrates that both context and person factors influence employees' motivational states, ultimately leading to VEGB (see *Figure 1*).

Figure 1

Theoretical framework for Employee Green Behavior based on Norton et al. (2015)



2. METHODS

2.1. Data collection

A qualitative study in the form of semi-structured interviews was conducted to answer the research questions. Interviews are particularly useful for understanding motives of the people studied for a certain opinion on the topic (StudySmarter GmbH, 2023), and offer more openness and flexibility in execution than questionnaires or other quantitative methods (Genau, 2021). The above outlined literature gaps present two distinct aspects of this research: *taking initiative* within VEGB and the role of organizational support in fostering autonomous motivation. These aspects were explored through interviews conducted at a case company, allowing for in-depth investigation of both dimensions in a real-world setting (Pfeiffer, 2023). The case company, a German small-to-medium-sized enterprise, where the main researcher is also employed, operates as a marketplace for sustainable goods, with sustainability embedded in its core business model.

Research population

The case company employs a total of 51 people. The sustainability manager was excluded from the research population, as they serve as the researcher's supervisor by the organization. Including them in the study could create a potential conflict of interest. Similarly, the main researcher was excluded from the research population to avoid any bias arising from their dual role as both an employee and investigator. This led to a research population of 49 employees in total.

Procedure

The sampling method used was voluntary response sampling, falling under the category of non-probability sampling. The entire research population was invited to participate in the interviews. Participation was voluntary, and all individuals who chose to respond were included in the study, following a voluntary response sampling method based on a full-population invitation (McCombes, 2023). As the participants all belong to a single organization, they form a relatively homogeneous group in terms of organizational context. Therefore, conducting 8–10 interviews was considered sufficient to gain meaningful insights and reach data saturation for the purposes of this qualitative study (Benders, 2022).

In total, nine employees responded and were interviewed. The remaining 40 employees did not respond, constituting the non-response portion of the population.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format. While the questions (*Appendix A*) were predetermined, their phrasing and order can vary. This format allows flexibility for open conversation and the inclusion of additional questions if needed (George, 2023).

The interviews were conducted online, via Microsoft Teams, chosen for its alignment with the case company. The platform was used by the company for communication and meetings, accommodating both remote and in-office employees. The interviews were held between April 07 and April 14, 2025, each lasting between 30 and 45 minutes.

Materials

The consent form and information sheet provided information on the interview's purpose, ensuring participants understand what to expect. The consent form and information sheet in English and German can be found in *Appendix A*.

The interview questions are grounded in the theoretical framework of Norton et al. (2015). For the first research question, the focus is on factors influencing employees' motivation to initiate sustainability efforts, including personal motivation, and contextual factors, with special respect to organizational factors. For the second research question, the interview questions delve deeper into the participants' perceptions of organizational factors, categorized into three dimensions: policies, activities, and attitudes (Norton et al., 2015).

This resulted in the identification of the following main interview topics: *person factors*, *context factors*, *organizational factors*, *policies*, *activities*, and *attitudes*. The interview guide can be found in *Appendix B*.

2.2. Data analysis

First, the interviews were transcribed using the intelligent verbatim transcription method, in which every spoken word was recorded, but grammatical corrections were made and redundant words were removed to improve readability (Pfeiffer, 2022). After transcription, the transcripts were manually translated into English for further analysis. The translated transcripts were then coded using ATLAS.ti.

The overarching topics were determined using a deductive approach (Caulfield, 2023), based on preconceived themes drawn from the research by Norton et al. (2015). These topics had

already been identified during the design of the interview questions (*Appendix B*) and served as an organizing framework for presenting the results (see *Chapter 3*).

The themes and codes were then developed inductively, emerging from the data during the analysis (Caulfield, 2023). The analysis led to a total 25 themes and 109 codes. These were organized under the overarching topics. A codebook was compiled to document the themes and codes. Additionally, each code was defined after the coding process for clarity. The codebook and corresponding definitions are presented in *Table C1* and *Table C2*. Quotes corresponding to each code and interview can be found in *Appendix C*, which links to a Google Sheet.

2.3. Ethical considerations

The researcher contacted employees via email, with the case company providing the necessary contact information. To minimize language barriers and foster open communication, all interviews were conducted in German, as it is all employees' first language.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Each employee received an invitation email explaining the study's purpose and objectives, allowing them to make an informed decision about whether to participate. All interviews were conducted anonymously. To ensure ethical standards were upheld, participants provided informed consent through a detailed consent form and information sheet (*Appendix B*).

Raw data access was restricted to the research team, and the findings were shared only with the case company and relevant stakeholders. The analyzed results remained confidential, and participants were given the option to designate specific responses as confidential to maintain comfort and autonomy during the interview process.

All collected data were used exclusively for the study's purposes. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and once transcription was completed, all recordings were permanently deleted to minimize data retention risks.

As one of the researchers was employed by the case company, they held a dual role presenting opportunities and challenges. This position allowed them to gain deeper insights into the organization's culture and internal dynamics, influencing employees' experiences. However, it also required a reflective approach to ensure awareness of potential biases. The researcher remained conscious of how their professional role and personal interactions within the organization may affect the interpretation of the data.

3. RESULTS

This section presents the main findings from the interviews, structured by the theoretical framework. An explanation and a visual presentation of the connection between the theory and the results is provided in *Appendix D*.

3.1. Factors impacting autonomous motivation

The first research question explores which factors impact employees' autonomous motivation to take initiative in sustainable practices as part of Voluntary Employee Green Behavior. Three key factor areas are identified: person factors, context factors, and organizational factors.

3.1.1. Person factors

Person factors influencing autonomous motivation include inspirations for motivation, personal values, and limits to motivation.

Inspiration for motivation: Among inspiration for motivation, employees identified five aspects that stimulate them to take initiative towards sustainable action. One common inspiration was employer-provided time off, mentioned by P1, P2, P5, and P6, all of whom used it to participate in public climate protests. The second aspect stemmed from colleagues' actions. P1, P6, P8, and P9 described being inspired by coworkers, with P8 stating it "*motivates you a bit*" and P1 adding, "*I find it inspiring.*" P3 and P6 found inspiration in the sustainable products and retailers featured on the company's marketplace. P7 cited their personal knowledge, brought into the workplace, as another source of inspiration. Lastly, habits played a dual role: P3 viewed them

as empowering, *"realiz[ing] it can be so simple,"* while P4 saw them as limiting, noting *"it's often convenience of habit that causes people to not behave as sustainably as they could."*

Personal values: Interviewees identified nine personal values that motivated their sustainability efforts at work. A strong emphasis was placed on knowledge-sharing, mentioned by six participants (P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9), with some seeing room for improvement, while others valued the existing culture. Four interviewees (P2, P3, P4, P6) were motivated by working for a company that aligns with their sustainability values, describing the organizational mission as reinforcing their own. Colleague interaction also played a role, with four participants (P3, P5, P7, P9) citing informal learning and shared commitment as motivating. Three interviewees (P2, P6, P7) pointed to existing company practices that made it easier to engage, with P6 noting, *"there are already a lot of approaches where you can simply participate."* Most participants, except P2 and P6, linked their actions at work to personal lifestyles, mentioning diets, social values, or upbringing as contributors. Additional individual drivers included the desire to inspire others (P4) and concerns for the environment, noted by five participants (P1, P2, P3, P6, P9). Interviewees P1 to P3 emphasized a future-oriented perspective, with P1 stating, *"not [only] for us, but for those who come after."* P9 also reflected on their sense of global responsibility, saying, *"Just because the others don't get it [...] I don't want to give in"*.

Limits to motivation: Employees identified a range of factors limiting their motivation to take initiative, though four interviewees (P2, P3, P8, P9) did not report limitations. As P2 identified, *"no hindrance at all,"* while P9 stated, *"I don't feel like [I am] being held back."* Several limitations were cited by only one or two participants. P4 mentioned being so engaged in

daily work that they “*easily forget about taking initiative,*” and also pointed to financial barriers as a common reason sustainable options “*don’t work out.*” Dependence on management (P7) and lack of knowledge (P7 and P9) were seen as limiting autonomy and confidence. Laziness, both personal and among colleagues, was noted by P1 and P4. P1 further highlighted public perception, stating sustainability actions “*not always [being] well-received.*” Time constraints and shifting priorities were recurring challenges. P6 described competing demands, while P2 and P3 were uncertain when to incorporate sustainable actions during work hours. Stress was another key theme, though experiences varied. P1 felt overwhelmed by large-scale initiatives, P3 struggled with the complexity of small actions, and P5 linked motivation to stress levels, noting they feel more engaged when given time off. Finally, remote work limited participation for P8, who shared that remote employees “*can’t participate in certain things,*” even if motivated.

3.1.2. Context factors

Contextual factors affecting employees’ motivation to take initiative are divided into external influences and external pressure.

External influences: A central external motivator was an employee-led sustainability initiative within the company, recognized by nearly all interviewees (except P8), and described as “*encouraging*” (P2) and “*motivating*” (P3). The internet was another influence, mentioned by P4 and P7. While P4 used it to research sustainability topics, P7 found inspiration via social media, especially the company’s Instagram, “*because [they] think [sustainability is] presented in a very vivid, simple, and somewhat humorous way.*” Additional factors were noted by individual participants. P2 was inspired by other companies’ sustainability efforts, P7 referred to the

broader “*young, sustainable movement*”, and P9 cited the global situation as a motivating force. In contrast, P4 emphasized that external factors played little role, saying most of what they do comes from “*either from [themselves] or from the company.*”

External pressure: All participants emphasized that their involvement in sustainability efforts is self-directed. Most interviewees (P1, P3, P4, P6, P8, P9) reported feeling no pressure, and several participants (P2, P5, P7) stressed the value of finding a personal, suitable approach. Still, subtle expectations were acknowledged. P5 mentioned a perceived need to show “*at least a minimum level of interest or willingness,*” while also noting the company encourages employees to take initiative. P6 supported this, though clarified: “*I don't feel under any pressure [...] Instead, I feel motivated to even initiate something myself.*” P1 uniquely described feeling both inspired and pressured when observing others take action: “*I find it inspiring on the one hand, but on the other hand, it sometimes puts [me] under pressure.*”

3.1.3. Organizational factors

Although organizational factors are often viewed as part of contextual factors, this study treats them separately to address a gap in the literature on their influence on autonomous motivation. Five themes emerged: activities and incentives, change of executive management, corporate culture, ideas for improvement, and structural support.

Activities and incentives: Six participants (P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P9) noted that attending public protests, supported by the company, motivated them to take action. Additionally, P1 and P6 mentioned a bike inspection, that encouraged them to prepare their bikes and consider cycling

more regularly. Only P1 mentioned the share-shelf, a space for exchanging reusable items, as a motivating organizational incentive.

Change of executive management: All interviewees, except P4, discussed the change in executive management, noting a clear shift between the old and new leadership. Several perceived a decline in sustainability engagement under the new management, citing a stronger focus on economics (P7), reduced visibility and support at events (P1, P7, P9), and a more top-down leadership style (P7). Additionally, P4, P7, and P9 highlighted the former leadership, especially one of the founders, as highly engaged in sustainability and a key driver of previous initiatives.

Corporate culture: While P7, P8, and P9 expressed uncertainty about what defines the company's corporate culture, many still felt it fostered sustainability. P9 valued "*the authenticity of the company and its philosophy*," and others (P5, P7, P8) said the culture reinforced their motivation. Sustainability was seen as holistically embedded in the company's image and practices by P1, P6, and P7. P4 added that internal communication played a key role in motivating action.

Ideas for improvement refers to employees' suggestions for enhancing organizational factors to better support autonomous motivation to engage in sustainability. P1 proposed concrete ideas, including digitizing business cards, increasing plant-based food options, and improving waste management. P4 emphasized better inclusion of remote workers in

sustainability opportunities. P2, P3, and P9 called for more organizational guidance, such as clearer instructions on when to act sustainably (P3) and goal-setting to provide direction (P9).

Structural support: Opportunities to participate in sustainability activities were motivating for P3, P6, and P8, who appreciated being “*inspired*” (P6), able to “*create the opportunity [themselves]*” (P8), and having “*the opportunity to get involved*” (P3). P9 valued flat hierarchies, stating they helped “*reduce social inequalities within the team,*” thereby supporting sustainability engagement.

3.2. Employees perception of organizational support towards autonomous motivation

While some organizational factors were discussed in Section 3.1.3, this section focuses on how employees perceive organizational support in sustaining and enhancing their autonomous motivation to take initiative. This is examined through three key areas of support identified in the literature: policies, activities, and attitudes. The overlaps between the sections reflect the dual role of organizational factors, as they influence motivation and are a source of sustained support.

3.2.1. Policies

This part presents employee perception and experience to existing and proposed organizational policies in relation to sustainability.

Current educational guidelines: Educational support related to sustainability was mentioned by two interviewees. P5 described being encouraged by a former team lead “*to take educational leave*”. P3 reported using *Good Habitz*, an online platform for skill development. P1 and P6 stated they were not using the platform.

Current operational guidelines: Three operational practices related to sustainability were identified. P1, P6, P7, and P9 referred to sustainability being integrated into general operations. P2, P3, and P4 mentioned that employees can choose sustainable transportation options. P2, P7, and P8 described efforts to replace conventional products in the workplace and marketplace.

Future policy ideas: Interviewees suggested a variety of ideas for future sustainability policies, including banning disposable food containers (P4), introducing dedicated sustainability days (P6), offering sustainably sourced coffee and aligning company values with personal ones (P8), supporting employee volunteering (P3), and improving office waste management (P1). P7 and P8 emphasized the need for more transparency around data. P1 and P7 identified a need for stronger sustainability training for all staff. P3, P5, and P9 suggested improving internal knowledge-sharing. P2 and P4 did not express a specific need for new policies but acknowledged that more guidelines could help. P6 opposed formal guidelines, stating, *“I don't think a company can or should stipulate something like that.”*

Guideline perception: Some interviewees described sustainability efforts as being initiated primarily by employees rather than directed by formal organizational policies. P2 stated that *“it's not necessarily the employer, but the people who work at [the company] who drive this.”* P1, P2, and P4 reported that they did not perceive organizational guidelines as influencing their personal motivation to act sustainably.

Issues with guidelines: Uncertainty around the existence or clarity of sustainability-related guidelines was raised by all interviewees except P1, P3, and P9. P1 referred to the company's marketplace criteria as a possible form of guidance, while also noting that employees were often unaware of its standards. P9 mentioned a general lack of transparency within the organization, particularly regarding salaries and internal communication. P1, P5, and P6 indicated that although sustainability guidelines or tools were available, they were not actively using them.

3.2.2. Activities

Activities influencing employees' motivation to take initiative are divided into supportive activities, discouraging activities, and employee-led initiatives.

Activities supporting employee participation: The most frequently mentioned activity was the Bingo event, held around the time of the interviews, which fostered community and competition and was cited by all interviewees except P7 as a sustainability-related motivator. Communal cooking was mentioned by P1, P3, P5, and P7 as encouraging engagement, and the same interviewees, along with P9, referred to attending public climate protests. A clothing swap organized by the company was noted by P4, P5, P6, and P7. P4 and P9 mentioned the City Clean-Up, where employees cleaned public spaces together. P3 and P4 mentioned a cycling challenge involving friendly competition as motivating. P2 and P3 referred generally to the company's activities as supportive, with P3 noting that participation often depends on daily responsibilities and availability. Activities mentioned by only one interviewee included

sustainable Christmas crafting (P1), holding warehouse sales to offer unsold fashion items at reduced prices (P4), and using a communication channel as a digital flea market (P7).

Activities discouraging employee participation: Some activities were perceived to discourage participation. P1 mentioned that frequent calls to join public protests creates stress. P9 pointed to the meeting culture and dynamics as a barrier. P5 found meetings focused on economic performance demotivating, and P7 described town hall meetings centered on new investments as discouraging for employee engagement.

Initiatives: The employee-led sustainability initiative within the company was mentioned by all interviewees, except P8, as a central initiative that motivated sustainability-related action. P6, P7 and P8 also referred to the work council, an employee-elected body to support and advocate for employees, as a factor that reinforces their motivation to act sustainably with P6 noting that it “*boosts [their] motivation*”. Lastly, P1, P2, and P3 described specific teams taking initiative on sustainability motivating them to take initiative.

3.2.3. Perceived attitudes

Interviewees shared perceptions of the sustainability attitudes of colleagues, managers, and the organization, and how these influenced their motivation to take initiative.

Colleagues' attitude towards sustainability: All interviewees except P1 and P7 described their colleagues as valuing sustainability. Four interviewees (P1, P3, P6, P9) mentioned that their colleagues actively practice sustainability in both professional and personal contexts, which they

found motivating. P2 to P6 observed differences in how colleagues take initiative, which they attributed to varying levels of individual motivation. P8 reflected on this variation by stating: “*If the management [is] no longer the most sustainable, then [they] just have to do a bit more.*”

Managerial attitude towards sustainability: Five interviewees (P2, P3, P5, P7, P9) stated their managers value sustainability. Four interviewees (P2, P3, P6, P8) noted that managers support sustainability-related proposals from employees. At the same time, several participants offered more critical views. P1 and P3 felt that some managers prioritize other values over sustainability. P1 suggested that managers' backgrounds make it more challenging for them to engage in sustainable practices. P5 and P7 described a focus on economic performance, with P7 noting that managers tend to support “*the most compelling argument*” rather than those centered on sustainability, while also stating this reflects “*just working life.*” P3 and P4 described management’s role as passive, and P5, P8, and P9 mentioned that some managers appear uncommitted to sustainability. Six interviewees (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8) expressed uncertainty about managerial attitudes, with two (P6 and P8) stating that they “*can’t judge that,*” and P2 and P8 indicating they “*don’t know*” the executive management well enough to assess their position.

Organizational attitude towards sustainability: P1, P6, P7, and P9 pointed to the integration of sustainability across company operations as an expression of the organization’s attitude. P2, P3, P5, P8, and P9 described sustainability as a core organizational value, and P2 and P4 said the company presents itself as a sustainability leader in its industry. P4, P6, P7, and P9 referenced knowledge-sharing as part of the company’s sustainability mindset. All

interviewees indicated that sustainability efforts are largely employee-driven, reflecting a bottom-up culture.

Organizational attitude supporting employee motivation: P2, P3, and P4 stated that they felt supported by the organization in their motivation to engage in sustainability, though they did not provide specific examples. P5 referred to the company's sustainability standards at work, noting that sustainable choices are "*accepted without question*". P1 cited the company's values and overall environment as motivating factors. P6 to P9 did not mention the organizational attitude in relation to motivation.

Critical reflections on organizational attitude: P4, P6, and P8 believed that the organization could improve its overall sustainability approach. P4 emphasized the importance of creating greater external impact. P7 expressed concern that the company relies too heavily on an employee-led sustainability initiative as a representation of its sustainability stance.

4. DISCUSSION

This study addresses a gap in the literature concerning the limited initiative among employees to engage in sustainable practices, with a focus on the role of autonomous motivation and the organizational factors that support it. To explore this, two research questions were posed. *Chapter 4.1* addresses the first question by examining person and context factors, including organizational factors, that shape employees' autonomous motivation to take initiative as part of Voluntary Employee Green Behavior. *Chapter 4.2* builds on this by exploring how employees perceive organizational support in sustaining and enhancing their motivation, aligning with the broader aim of identifying how organizations can encourage sustainability engagement.

4.1. Factors impacting autonomous motivation

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2012) posits that motivation is most robust when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and alignment with their internal values. This framework was reflected in participants' experiences, where sustainable behavior was deeply connected to personal beliefs, a sense of meaning, and authenticity in the workplace. Many interviewees described a strong congruence between their own values and those of the organization, often citing sustainability as genuinely embedded in the company's culture. This embeddedness fostered intrinsic motivation and a deeper internalization of environmental goals, reinforcing self-determined motivation in line with SDT (Zhang et al., 2022; Shi et al., 2024). Moreover, while participants generally felt free to choose how they engaged in sustainability efforts, organizational nudges, when aligned with personal values, were experienced as supportive. These findings support Norton et al.'s (2015) distinction between willingness and

contextual capacity, underscoring the importance of an enabling environment in sustaining voluntary, values-driven environmental action.

Simultaneously, some findings complicate or extend the theory. Personal environmental knowledge was rarely mentioned as a motivator, suggesting that within this organizational context, motivation may be more socially constructed than individually held. Habits were described as both enabling and limiting, a dual role that remains underexplored in the VEGB literature despite being noted by Norton et al. (2015). One participant also cited a desire to inspire others, pointing to relational forms of motivation that SDT touches on only partially, though they are acknowledged by Zhang et al. (2022).

Environmental concerns were another strong motivator, especially when participants reflected on long-term perspectives and global environmental challenges. Many cited heightened awareness of the broader sustainability movement as influencing their engagement. Knowledge-sharing within the organization also emerged as an important factor. These findings correspond with literature highlighting the interplay between internalized values and societal narratives (Fawehinmi et al., 2020; Nurcholis et al., 2025). Such alignment is linked to pro-environmental behavior and underscores the role of information as a contextual resource (Norton et al., 2015).

Participants described using digital platforms to support their motivation, engaging in targeted online research or following sustainability-related content on the company's Instagram account. These digital interactions served as sources of knowledge and reinforced attunement with environmental values. This supports the idea that institutional resources can cultivate internal motivation and that environmental knowledge remains closely tied to sustainable behavior (Fawehinmi et al., 2020).

Participants also described being inspired by colleagues or feeling more committed through supportive team relationships, illustrating how social dynamics can significantly shape motivation. These interpersonal influences correspond with Norton et al.'s (2015) emphasis on team-level factors and are further supported by literature (Zafar et al., 2025; Nurcholis et al., 2025), identifying mutual reinforcement and a sense of relatedness as key drivers of VEGB. However, these dynamics were not uniformly positive. Some participants expressed concern about how their actions might be perceived by others, and one described feelings of guilt when comparing their efforts to those of more active colleagues. Such reflections point to the complex role of peer influence, which can both enhance motivation through connection and introduce pressure through social comparison. This tension between internal drive and external validation echoes the concerns raised by Nielsen and Gamborg (2024), who caution that motivation rooted in guilt or expectation may ultimately weaken sustained engagement.

At the institutional level, external organizational messaging shaped engagement. One participant mentioned being inspired by other companies, supporting Zhang et al. (2021), who emphasize how communication can influence environmental attitudes and help turn awareness into action. Within the organization itself, contextual conditions played a complex role. While many participants found the environment supportive, others pointed to gaps. One interviewee felt that remote work reduced their motivation due to a lack of tailored support. Others expressed a desire for clearer structures and guidance, suggesting that while motivation existed, it was not always matched by practical opportunities to act. These reflections support research emphasizing the importance of perceived access and direction (Bashirun et al., 2019; Zacher et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022).

Instrumental support, such as company-provided time off to attend climate protests, also contributed to sustained engagement by serving as an organizational signal that encourages VEGB (Zhang et al., 2022). Other examples included sustainable products offered on the marketplace and value alignment during hiring, reinforcing motivation. These findings are consistent with the link between authenticity and engagement described by Nurcholis et al. (2025) and Zhang et al. (2022).

Beyond individual programs, broader structural features of the organization also supported engagement, as several participants pointed to participatory opportunities and flat hierarchies that reduced barriers and fostered inclusion. These observations align with findings that highlight perceived opportunity and organizational support as essential conditions for sustainable behavior (Norton et al., 2015; Zacher et al., 2023). Several participants also linked a rise in hierarchical structures to a diminished sense of autonomy, supporting the idea that VEGB rather thrives under conditions of perceived autonomy (Ying et al., 2020).

Barriers to motivation revealed further complexity. Although some participants initially reported no constraints, all eventually identified limitations. This gap may reflect unconscious bias or impression management, as Kuratomi et al. (2023) suggest that people tend to overestimate their intrinsic motivation under real-world pressures. Key barriers included limited managerial support, financial constraints, and reduced access to resources due to remote work. These challenges highlight the importance of accessible, context-sensitive support (Zacher et al., 2023; Zafar et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2021). Participants further identified personal challenges including time pressure, stress, lack of prioritization, and knowledge gaps. These reflect Shi et al.'s (2024) concept of Green Behavior Interference with Job, in which sustainability is perceived as competing with core work tasks.

4.2. Employees perception of organizational support towards autonomous motivation

Many participants described the organization as generally supportive of sustainable behavior, with an open atmosphere and shared environmental values. The employee-led sustainability initiative was frequently mentioned as a meaningful way to participate. Its visibility and integration with broader company practices suggested a level of organizational endorsement that can strengthen VEGB through perceived support (Bashirun et al., 2019).

Some participants questioned the depth of the company's sustainability commitment. While the employee-led sustainability initiative was appreciated, several expressed concern that the organization relied too heavily on this initiative. This raised doubts about whether sustainability was genuinely embedded in the company culture or remained largely symbolic. Instrumentally motivated actions, if not supported by formal structures, can undermine trust (Zhang et al., 2022), and symbolic gestures require consistent reinforcement to be perceived as authentic (Bashirun et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2025).

These concerns were reflected in inconsistent experiences across teams. While some described value alignment, others struggled to name concrete examples of organizational support. The lack of structured initiatives including communication, training, or leadership involvement, engagement often depended on individual initiative and perceived autonomy. Yang et al. (2025) emphasize that consistent institutional reinforcement is necessary for long-term motivation, while Adewumi (2024) highlights the importance of credible leadership.

Peer influence further played a role, though its impact varied. Some participants described a positive sustainability attitude among colleagues, yet few directly linked peer behavior to their own. Differences in initiative levels may reflect variations in perceived support or access to opportunity (Norton et al., 2015). One participant described taking personal

responsibility for sustainability in the absence of leadership, highlighting the tension between individual agency and organizational gaps. Team culture also played a role, with localized efforts occasionally described as motivating. However, these were often undermined by time constraints and workload demands, consistent with the idea of Green Behavior Interference with Job (Shi et al., 2024). Social events such as communal cooking or sustainability-themed games were generally seen as inclusive and encouraging. By fostering a sense of shared purpose, these activities highlight the role of collectivism and inclusion in promoting engagement (Norton et al., 2015; Zafar et al., 2025; Adewumi, 2024).

Participants frequently noted that sustainability efforts felt largely employee-driven. Although the organization communicated sustainability as a core value, many described a disconnect between this messaging and actual implementation. Initiatives were often perceived as bottom-up, rather than strategically guided. Bashirun et al. (2019) identify this gap between symbolic values and operational follow-through, where behavior relies on personal attitudes and perceived control. In line with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), they emphasize that in the absence of institutional reinforcement, engagement depends on individual agency and normative pressure. Peer support helped sustain motivation in some cases, but participants also noted that peer-led efforts could not replace leadership.

Perceptions of leadership further shaped these dynamics, while some participants felt supported, others described management as disengaged or unclear in their stance on sustainability, which reduced its visibility as a shared organizational priority. A lack of clear communication was seen as a major barrier, as initiatives often stall when leaders fail to demonstrate genuine commitment (Adewumi, 2024). Some participants also noted the absence of

supportive structures such as training, feedback, and guidance, which are essential for enabling sustained engagement (Tsymbaliuk et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2025).

Furthermore, leadership and communication were closely intertwined with participants mentioning operational efforts like sustainable transport, however, inconsistent messaging reduced their visibility and impact. Some were aware of tools, such as Good Habitz, but did not use them, while others reported broader communication gaps. These patterns suggest that a clearly communicated pro-environmental climate, along with accessible tools and guidance, may be important for effective engagement (Zacher et al., 2023). Zafar et al. (2025) similarly highlight the role of shared communication norms in fostering commitment. One interviewee described feeling overwhelmed by protest-related calls, illustrating how even well-meaning messaging can feel pressuring. This reflects concerns that social pressure or externally driven motivation may result in guilt and eventual disengagement (Nielsen & Gamborg, 2024). As Adewumi (2024) argues, consistent and credible communication is necessary to turn values into sustained action.

Finally, intrinsic motivation and value alignment emerged as important drivers of engagement. While these are primarily individual-level factors, they were clearly influenced by organizational context. Some participants described meetings focused mainly on financials as demotivating, reinforcing the disconnect between internal communication and stated sustainability values. Zhang et al. (2021) argue that alignment between messaging and environmental goals is essential for credibility. In response, employees proposed more visible actions, such as banning disposables or organizing sustainability days. One participant described stepping in to take personal responsibility, illustrating how behavior stems from both internal motivation and the surrounding environment (Norton et al., 2015). When employees perceive

authenticity and feel supported by the organization (Shi et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2022; Bashirun et al., 2019), VEGB becomes more likely. This is further supported by comments on educational tools like Good Habitz, which were only used when personally meaningful. These examples highlight how individual motivation is often expressed or limited through perceived organizational support.

4.3. Limitations

Caution is advised when generalizing the findings to the wider employee population and other companies. Generalizability of findings depends on the randomness, representativeness, and size of the sample group. Voluntary response sampling limits randomness, as only self-selected employees participated. This approach limits the applicability of the findings to all employees or other organizations. Only nine of 49 employees responded, resulting in a high non-response rate and potential bias. Self-selection can favor those more confident or positively inclined toward sustainability, while others may opt out due to lack of knowledge or interest. Consequently, the sample may not fully represent the broader employee population. While the sample size aligned with qualitative research standards, some aspects were expressed by only one participant, indicating that additional interviews may have uncovered further perspectives.

Consistent procedures reliability and validity, however, semi-structured interviews introduce variability in question delivery, which can affect reliability. Additionally, since the case company operates in the sustainability sector, findings may not apply to less sustainability-focused or different industry contexts.

Additional biases must be acknowledged, including social desirability bias. Despite anonymous and voluntary participation, participants may have tailored their responses to align with perceived expectations, particularly since one researcher was a company employee. This

dynamic may have led to overstated motivation or restrained criticism in a sustainability-focused context. Although some critical views emerged, findings should be interpreted with caution. Observer bias is another concern, as the researchers' familiarity with the organization may have influenced interpretations or subtly guided participants, reinforcing favorable portrayals.

Lastly, the company's ongoing management transition was noted by several participants, who observed changes in sustainability priorities under new leadership. These reflections are valid but should be understood within the broader context of organizational change, where perceptions may be shaped as much by uncertainty as by actual policy shifts.

Transdisciplinary reflection: Collaborating with a case company revealed key differences in how knowledge is approached in academia and practice. While academic work seeks structured explanations, conversations with employees were grounded in personal experience, informal practices, and everyday challenges. Sustainability was expressed through individual efforts rather than formal strategies. Working with the organization required adapting academic language to practical considerations, fostering mutual understanding despite differing perspectives. This collaboration required translating theoretical concepts into practical terms and fostering mutual understanding across perspectives. Engaging with the organization shaped both the direction and relevance of the research, helping ensure that the outcomes were meaningful beyond academic discourse.

5. CONCLUSION

Employees' autonomous motivation is shaped by a combination of personal values, social influence, and contextual awareness. Many are driven by intrinsic factors such as environmental concern, ethical beliefs, and future-oriented thinking. This personal motivation often extends from lifestyle choices into the workplace, fostering a sense of authenticity and continuity. Social dynamics further reinforce motivation with colleagues serving as role models, and informal conversations help spread sustainable ideas. These interactions contribute to a sense of community and shared responsibility, enhancing motivation without formal pressure. External influences like global environmental issues and social media were also noted, though less prominently. Most participants reported acting out of personal conviction rather than obligation, with only minor experiences of guilt or peer comparison. Leadership changes, however, introduced uncertainty, sometimes weakening motivation. When sustainability was visibly valued by management, it reinforced employee engagement, however, when support declined, motivation did as well. Overall, voluntary sustainable action is strongest when employees' values align with their environment and they feel socially supported, yet free to act autonomously.

Perceptions of organizational support were mixed, with employees recognizing various efforts to promote sustainability while noting inconsistencies in how these supported their motivation. The employee-led initiative and activities including climate-related events, and socially engaging initiatives were widely viewed as meaningful, particularly when they fostered collaboration and aligned with employees' desire for autonomy. Formal policies and guidelines were less consistently cited as motivating, with several employees unaware of or uncertain about existing frameworks. In many cases, sustainable actions appeared to originate more from

individual or employee-led initiatives than top-down directives. While attitudes among colleagues were generally supportive, perceptions of managerial commitment varied, particularly in light of recent leadership changes. Some appreciated open communication and flat hierarchies, while others noted a decline in visibility and clarity around sustainability goals. Overall, while organizational support can reinforce motivation, it was often informal and secondary to personal and peer-driven efforts. However, intrinsic commitment among employees offers a solid foundation to build a more inclusive and sustainable workplace culture.

5.1. Practical and theoretical implications

To sustain autonomous motivation for sustainable behavior, the case company should strengthen alignment between individual values and organizational support. Many employees are intrinsically driven by personal environmental values, which often influenced their decision to join the company. Reinforcing this internal motivation requires clear, consistent communication of the sustainability mission and stronger links to shared purpose.

The employee-led sustainability initiative stands out as a successful employee-led initiative, fostering visibility, ownership, and peer-driven momentum. Building on this model, by allocating resources, increasing visibility, and encouraging similar team-based projects, can deepen engagement. Collective activities at the team level also help strengthen social motivation and normalize sustainable behaviors across the organization.

Employees also expressed a need for practical, accessible sustainability training. Existing resources are underused, suggesting gaps in clarity and relevance. Training should be role-specific, easy to apply, and personally meaningful. Embedding sustainable practices, like offering eco-friendly meals, digitizing materials, or improved waste-management, can help build

lasting habits. However, participation must remain voluntary, as presenting it as an opportunity rather than an obligation reduces guilt and promotes a positive, inclusive culture.

Remote workers felt less connected to sustainability efforts, highlighting the need for hybrid-friendly approaches including virtual challenges, digital resources, and remote-inclusive initiatives.

Leadership and management emerged as key drivers of perceived sustainability commitment. A decline in visible sustainability leadership following executive turnover was seen as demotivating. To counter this, both executive and mid-level managers must consistently model sustainable behavior, clearly communicate goals, and support local action. Targeted manager training can help bridge the gap between strategy and day-to-day execution.

Finally, to better understand and strengthen the organizational structures that support employee green behavior, the company could explore further research, particularly into Green leadership practices and quantitative validation of current engagement patterns. This would help identify effective levers for sustained motivation and ensure that sustainable action is not only encouraged but meaningfully supported across all levels of the organization.

This study supports and extends the framework proposed by Norton et al. (2015) by showing how autonomous motivation for Voluntary Employee Green Behavior is shaped through both personal and contextual influences. The findings confirm the relevance of between-person factors such as intrinsic motivation and environmental values, while also showing how these are mediated by organizational experiences, particularly value alignment and perceived authenticity. The importance of within-person variation is reflected in how motivation fluctuated in response

to contextual signals, including leadership behavior and communication practices, which aligns with the dynamic view of motivation outlined by Norton et al. (2015).

The results further clarify the role of contextual levels within the framework. At the organizational level, structural support, credible communication, and non-symbolic engagement were central to sustaining motivation. At the team level, peer dynamics emerged as both supportive and constraining, suggesting a more ambivalent influence than previously assumed. While the leader level was addressed through perceptions of visibility and value-driven leadership, the institutional level was largely absent in participants' accounts. This suggests that broader societal or regulatory pressures were not strongly perceived or did not significantly shape employees' day-to-day engagement with sustainability in this organizational context.

5.2. Future research recommendations

This study reinforces core findings in Voluntary Employee Green Behavior (VEGB) research, particularly the importance of autonomous motivation, as outlined by Self-Determination Theory. Simultaneously, it highlights underexplored areas that need further investigation. First, value alignment with the organization is crucial in sustaining motivation. While this link is acknowledged in existing literature, more research is needed on how it evolves and responds to organizational shifts such as leadership changes. Second, informal peer dynamics, team culture, social norms, and employee-driven initiatives, significantly influence VEGB. Future studies should examine how these mechanisms operate across teams and hierarchies, and how habitual behaviors can both enable and constrain green action, a dual role often overlooked in VEGB research.

Furthermore, a gap between employees' self-reported motivation and actual behavioral constraints like stress and time pressure was found. This suggests the need to explore

unconscious motivational barriers, cognitive dissonance, and social desirability effects. Variability in access to environmental knowledge further influenced engagement, highlighting the need to investigate how information availability impacts employee motivation.

Leadership transitions, particularly shifts toward economic over environmental priorities, were seen to dampen employee motivation. Research should further examine how leadership continuity and value signaling affect sustained VEGB. Importantly, remote workers reported reduced opportunities for sustainable action, suggesting a growing need to study VEGB within hybrid and decentralized work environments. Finally, as this study focuses on a sustainability-oriented company, comparative research is needed across organizations with differing environmental commitments to better understand how culture and structure shape motivation.

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Appendix A

Consent form and information sheet

Figure A1

Information sheet form for potential participants in English (for grading purposes)



Information Sheet for Interview Participants

Research Title:	Exploring Voluntary Employee Green Behavior at work	
Executing Institution:	Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RUG) - Campus Fryslan	
Project Management:	Franzi Steinherr	Researcher
	Berfu Ünal	RUG Supervisor

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. This letter explains what the research entails and how the research will be conducted. Please take time to read the following information carefully. If any information is not clear kindly ask questions using the contact details of the researchers provided at the end of this letter. This consent form is necessary to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation.

What is this study about?

The goal of this research is to examine which factors promote the autonomous motivation (=motivation emerging from an intrinsic desire) of employees to independently engage in sustainable practices. Additionally, it analyzes how employees perceive the role of organizational support in sustaining and enhancing their autonomous motivation. This study is carried out as part of the Master thesis research of the main investigator. It is self-funded and does not receive external sponsorship or funding.

What does participation involve?

Your participation in this study involves a one-on-one interview, via Microsoft Teams, which will explore your experiences and perspectives on sustainability practices within the organization. The interview will take approximately 30–45 minutes. It is not anticipated that there are any risks associated with your participation. However, you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Do you have to participate?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason or facing any consequences. Additionally, you are not required to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable.

Are there any risks in participating?

The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. There are no physical or psychological risks expected. However, participants may experience minor discomfort in discussing organizational or personal insights. You are encouraged to express concerns at any time and skip any question you are not comfortable answering.

Are there any benefits in participating?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, the findings may contribute to a better understanding of what motivates employees to independently engage in sustainable practices and how the company can support intrinsic motivation. This knowledge can help further support sustainable practices at work.

How will information you provide be recorded, stored, and protected?

All information you provide will be treated with confidentiality. Audio recordings will be transcribed, anonymized, and securely stored. No identifying information, such as your name, job title, or company details, will be included in the analysis or reporting unless you explicitly provide consent for such details to be made public. Data will be stored according to GDPR rules at the University of Groningen. Only the principal investigator and authorized research assessors will have access to the data. Audio recordings will be deleted after transcription. Anonymized data may be retained for future academic purposes but will remain confidential.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of this study will be presented in a research dissertation submitted to the University of Groningen. Findings may also be shared in academic publications, presentations, or online platforms to reach broader audiences. Participants will not be identifiable in any published materials.

Ethics approval

This research study has obtained ethical approval from the Campus Fryslân Ethics Committee.

The researchers will uphold themselves to relevant ethical standards, including transparency, respect for participants, and academic integrity.

Figure A2

Consent form for potential participants in English (for grading purposes)



Informed Consent Form

Research Title: Exploring Voluntary Employee Green Behavior at work

Executing Institution: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RUG) - Campus Fryslân

Case company: Avocado Store GmbH

Project Management: Franz Steinherr Researcher
Berfu Ünal RUG Supervisor

Assessment

- I have read the information sheet and was able to ask any additional questions to the researcher.
- I understand I may ask questions about the study at any time.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.
- I understand that at any time I can refuse to answer any question without any consequences.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I have read and agree to the Microsoft Teams privacy policy

Confidentiality and Data Use

- I understand that none of my individual information will be disclosed to anyone outside the study team and my name will not be published.
- I understand that the information provided will be used only for this research and publications directly related to this research project.
- I understand that data (consent forms, recordings, interview transcripts) will be retained on the Y-drive of the University of Groningen server for 5 years, in correspondence with the university GDPR legislation.

**Future involvement**

- I wish to receive a copy of the scientific output of the project.
- I consent to be re-contacted for participating in future studies.

Participants Name

Participants Signature

Date**To be filled in by the researcher**

- I declare that I have thoroughly informed the research participant about the research study and answered any remaining questions to the best of my knowledge.
- I agree that this person participates in the research study.

Researcher Name

Researcher Signature

Date

**Contact information**

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Researcher: Franziska Steinherr
Tel: +31 6 21 96 86 81
E-Mail: f.c.steinherr@student.rug.nl

You can also contact the researchers' supervisor from the executing institution:

Name: Berfu Ünal
E-Mail: a.b.unal@rug.nl

Figure A3

Information sheet form for potential participants in German



Informationsblatt für Interviewteilnehmer:innen

Forschungstitel: Exploring Voluntary Employee Green Behavior at work
Durchführende Institution: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RUG) - Campus Fryslân
Projektleitung: Franz Steinherr Hauptforschende
 Berfu Ünal Betreuende Person (RUG)

Liebe:r Teilnehmer:in,

vielen Dank für Dein Interesse an dieser Forschung. Dieses Schreiben erklärt, worum es in der Studie geht und wie sie durchgeführt wird. Bitte nimm Dir Zeit, die folgenden Informationen sorgfältig zu lesen. Falls etwas unklar ist, kannst Du jederzeit Fragen stellen – die Kontaktdaten der Forschenden findest Du am Ende dieses Dokuments. Diese Einwilligungserklärung stellt sicher, dass Du den Zweck Deiner Teilnahme verstehst und den Bedingungen zustimmst.

Worum geht es in dieser Studie?

Diese Forschung untersucht, welche Faktoren die autonome Motivation (= Motivation, die aus einem inneren Antrieb entsteht) von Mitarbeitenden fördern, sich unabhängig für nachhaltige Praktiken zu engagieren. Zudem wird analysiert, wie Mitarbeitende organisatorischen Unterstützung bei der Förderung und Aufrechterhaltung ihrer Motivation wahrnehmen. Die Studie ist Teil einer Masterarbeit der Hauptforschenden. Sie wird eigenfinanziert und erhält keine externe Förderung.

Was bedeutet die Teilnahme für Dich?

Die Teilnahme umfasst ein Einzelinterview über Microsoft Teams, in dem Deine Erfahrungen und Perspektiven zur Nachhaltigkeit innerhalb der Organisation besprochen werden. Das Interview dauert etwa 30–45 Minuten. Es gibt keine bekannten Risiken für die Teilnahme. Du kannst das Interview jederzeit abbrechen oder Deine Teilnahme an der Forschung zurückziehen.

Musst Du teilnehmen?

Die Teilnahme an dieser Studie ist vollkommen freiwillig. Du kannst jederzeit ohne Angabe von Gründen aus der Studie aussteigen, ohne dass Dir daraus Nachteile entstehen. Du musst ebenfalls keine Fragen beantworten, die Dir unangenehm sind.

Gibt es Risiken bei der Teilnahme?

Die Risiken sind minimal. Es werden keine physischen oder psychischen Belastungen erwartet. Es könnte jedoch vorkommen, dass einige Fragen zu persönlichen oder organisatorischen Einsichten leichte Unannehmlichkeiten verursachen. Du kannst jederzeit Bedenken äußern oder Fragen überspringen, die Du nicht beantworten möchtest.

Gibt es Vorteile für Dich?

Es gibt keine direkten Vorteile für Dich als Teilnehmer:in. Die Ergebnisse könnten jedoch dazu beitragen, ein besseres Verständnis dafür zu entwickeln, was Mitarbeitende motiviert, sich eigenständig für nachhaltige Praktiken zu engagieren, und wie das Unternehmen diese intrinsische Motivation unterstützen kann. Dies kann zur Förderung nachhaltiger Praktiken am Arbeitsplatz beitragen.

Wie werden die bereitgestellten Informationen erfasst, gespeichert und geschützt?

Alle bereitgestellten Informationen werden vertraulich behandelt. Die Interviews werden aufgezeichnet, transkribiert und anonymisiert. Es werden keine identifizierenden Informationen (z. B. Name, Berufsbezeichnung oder Unternehmensdetails) in der Analyse oder Veröffentlichung enthalten sein, es sei denn, Du hast ausdrücklich zugestimmt. Die Daten werden gemäß der Datenschutz-Grundverordnung (GDPR) der Universität Groningen gespeichert. Nur die Hauptforschende und berechtigte Forschende haben Zugriff darauf. Die Audioaufnahmen werden nach der Transkription gelöscht. Anonymisierte Daten können für zukünftige akademische Zwecke verwendet werden, bleiben jedoch vertraulich.

Was passiert mit den Ergebnissen der Studie?

Die Ergebnisse werden in einer Forschungsarbeit an der Universität Groningen veröffentlicht. Die Erkenntnisse können außerdem in akademischen Veröffentlichungen, Präsentationen oder Online-Plattformen geteilt werden. In keiner Veröffentlichung werden Teilnehmer:innen identifizierbar sein.

Ethik Genehmigung

Diese Studie wurde von der Ethikkommission des Campus Fryslân genehmigt. Die Forschenden verpflichten sich zur Einhaltung ethischer Standards, einschließlich Transparenz, Respekt gegenüber den Teilnehmer:innen, und wissenschaftlicher Integrität.

Kontaktinformation

Falls Du weitere Fragen oder Bedenken hast, kontaktiere bitte:

Hauptforscherin: Franziska Steinherr
Telefonnummer: +31 6 21 96 86 81
E-Mail: f.c.steinherr@student.rug.nl

Du kannst dich auch an die Betreuerin der Hauptforscherin wenden:

Name: Berfu Ünal
E-Mail: a.b.unal@rug.nl

Figure A4

Consent form for potential participants in German



Einwilligungserklärung

Forschungstitel: Exploring Voluntary Employee Green Behavior at work
Durchführende Institution: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RUG) - Campus Fryslan
Fallunternehmen: Avocado Store GmbH
Projektleitung: Franz Steinherr Hauptforschende
 Berfu Ünal Betreuende Person (RUG)

Einwilligungspunkte

- Ich habe das Informationsblatt gelesen und konnte Fragen an die Forschenden stellen.
- Ich verstehe, dass ich jederzeit Fragen zur Studie stellen kann.
- Ich verstehe, dass ich meine Teilnahme an der Studie jederzeit ohne Angabe von Gründen zurückziehen kann.
- Ich verstehe, dass ich Fragen nicht beantworten muss, wenn sie mir unangenehm sind.
- Ich verstehe, dass mir aus der Teilnahme an der Forschung kein direkter Vorteil entsteht.
- Ich habe die Datenschutzrichtlinie von Microsoft Teams gelesen und akzeptiere sie.

Vertraulichkeit und Datenverwendung

- Ich verstehe, dass keine meiner persönlichen Informationen außerhalb des Forschungsteams weitergegeben werden und mein Name nicht veröffentlicht wird.
- Ich verstehe, dass meine Informationen nur für diese Forschung und dazugehörige Publikationen genutzt werden.
- Ich verstehe, dass Daten (Einwilligungsformulare, Aufnahmen, Interviewtranskripte) für fünf Jahre auf dem Y-Laufwerk der Universität Groningen gemäß der DSGVO gespeichert werden.

Zukünftige Beteiligung

- Ich möchte eine Kopie der wissenschaftlichen Ergebnisse des Projekts erhalten.
- Ich bin damit einverstanden, für zukünftige Studien kontaktiert zu werden.

Unterschrift der/des Teilnehmer:in_____
Name_____
Signatur_____
Datum**Von der Hauptforscherin auszufüllen:**

- Ich erkläre, dass ich die teilnehmende Person ausführlich über die Studie informiert und alle offenen Fragen nach bestem Wissen beantwortet habe.
- Ich stimme der Teilnahme dieser Person an der Forschung zu

Unterschrift der Hauptforscherin_____
Name_____
Signatur_____
Datum

Appendix B

Interview guide

Interview Opening in English (for grading purposes)

Good morning,

Thank you for taking the time to conduct this interview with me today.

The aim of this interview is to investigate the following research questions:

- 1) What factors drive employees' autonomous motivation at this organization to take initiative and engage in sustainable practices through Voluntary Employee Green Behavior (VEGB)?
- 2) How do employees at this organization perceive the role of organizational support to maintain and strengthen their autonomous motivation to take initiative for sustainable practices?

Do you have any questions of your own that you would like to address in this interview? Or is there anything you think we have overlooked in our questions?

The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. You can ask to pause or stop the recording at any time.

The data collected will be anonymized as already described in the privacy consent form you signed. If you would like to reconsider or change your decision regarding data protection, please let me know now.

This is a semi-structured interview. I have prepared questions but may ask follow-up questions to clarify or get detailed answers. There are no right or wrong answers and you can skip any question you feel uncomfortable with. Your answers will remain confidential and will only be used for internal purposes at the organization.

Before we begin: Do you have any questions or concerns? Do you agree with the guidelines and are you ready to start?

Great, then I will start the recording now.

Interview Opening in German

Guten Morgen, und vielen Dank, dass du dir die Zeit nimmst, heute mit mir das Interview zu führen.

Ziel dieses Interviews ist es, die folgenden Forschungsfragen zu untersuchen:

- 1) Welche Faktoren fördern die autonome Motivation der Mitarbeitenden in der Organisation, Initiative zu ergreifen und sich im Rahmen von freiwilligem nachhaltigem Verhalten (Voluntary Employee Green Behavior, VEGB) für nachhaltige Praktiken zu engagieren?
- 2) Wie nehmen Mitarbeitende der Organisation die Rolle der organisatorischen Unterstützung wahr, um ihre autonome Motivation zur Initiative für nachhaltige Praktiken zu erhalten und zu stärken?

Hast du selbst noch Fragen, die du gerne in diesem Interview ansprechen möchtest? Oder gibt es etwas, das du denkst, wir hätten in unseren Fragen übersehen?

Das Interview wird etwa 30–45 Minuten dauern und für die Analyse aufgezeichnet und transkribiert. Du kannst jederzeit darum bitten, die Aufnahme zu pausieren oder zu beenden.

Die erhobenen Daten werden anonymisiert, wie bereits im Datenschutz-Einwilligungsformular, das du unterschrieben hast, beschrieben wurde. Falls du deine Entscheidung bezüglich des Datenschutzes überdenken oder ändern möchtest, lass es mich bitte jetzt wissen.

Dies ist ein halbstrukturiertes Interview. Ich habe Fragen vorbereitet, werde jedoch eventuell Folgefragen stellen, um Klarheit zu schaffen oder detaillierte Antworten zu erhalten. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten, und du kannst jede Frage überspringen, bei der du dich unwohl fühlst. Deine Antworten bleiben vertraulich und werden nur für interne Zwecke bei der Organisation verwendet.

Bevor wir beginnen: Hast du noch Fragen oder Bedenken? Bist du mit den Richtlinien einverstanden und bereit zu starten? Wenn ja, beginne ich jetzt mit der Aufnahme.

Interview questions in English (for grading purposes)

Table B1

Interview questions, including follow-up questions, to address each research question based on the theoretical framework in English

Division by theory	Interview questions	Follow-up questions	Research question
Motivation	What inspires or motivates you personally to participate in sustainability practices at work?	What personal values or beliefs drive your motivation to engage in sustainability practices?	What factors promote autonomous motivation of employees to take initiative to engage in sustainability practices as part of Voluntary Employee Green Behavior (VEGB)?
	Are there certain factors that actively prevent or limit you from contributing to sustainability initiatives at the company?		
Contextual Factors beyond control	Are there any external factors (e.g., tools, resources, policies) that influence your motivation to take initiative in sustainability efforts?	Can you describe a situation where external factors (like resources, tools, or time constraints) either helped or hindered your ability to engage in sustainable practices?	
	To what extent do you feel you can freely choose how to engage in sustainability practices, without external pressure?		
Organizational factors	What organizational practices (e.g., policies, incentives, or initiatives) do you think influence employees' motivation to engage in voluntary green behaviors?	What aspects of the company's policies or culture make you feel empowered to take initiative in sustainability, and what could be improved?	
	How do these organizational factors enhance or limit your motivation to act on sustainability initiatives at work?		
Policies	How do company policies related to sustainability influence your motivation to participate voluntarily?	Can you share an example of a policy that had a noticeable impact on your motivation to engage in sustainability practices?	How do employees perceive the role of organizational

	Are there any specific policies you think could be added or improved to better support your efforts?		support in sustaining and enhancing their autonomous motivations to take initiative to engage in sustainable practices?
Activities	What sustainability-related activities or initiatives at the company inspire you to take voluntary action?	How do specific company activities or events make you feel more or less encouraged to voluntarily engage in sustainability efforts?	
	How effective do you think these activities are in encouraging employee participation?		
Attitudes	How do you perceive the organization’s overall attitude toward sustainability and employee-led initiatives?	In what ways do the organization’s attitudes toward sustainability make you feel supported or unsupported in taking voluntary initiatives?	
	Do you feel that management or colleagues genuinely value voluntary contributions to sustainability? Why or why not?		

Interview questions in German

Table B2

Interview questions, including follow-up questions, to address each research question based on the theoretical framework in German

Einteilung nach Theorie	Interview Fragen	Follow-up Fragen	Forschungs- fragen
Motivation	Was inspiriert oder motiviert Dich persönlich, dich bei der Arbeit für nachhaltige Maßnahmen oder Verhaltensweisen einzusetzen?	Welche persönlichen Werte oder Überzeugungen treiben Deine Motivation an, Dich für Nachhaltigkeit zu engagieren, und wie passen diese zu Deiner Rolle bei der Arbeit?	Welche Faktoren fördern die autonome Motivation der Mitarbeitenden der Organisation, Eigeninitiative zu ergreifen und sich im Rahmen von freiwilligem grünem Verhalten der Mitarbeitenden (Voluntary Employee Green Behavior, VEGB) für Nachhaltigkeitspraktiken einzusetzen?
	Hindern Dich bestimmte Faktoren daran, Dich aktiv im Sinne der Nachhaltigkeit zu verhalten?		
Kontextuelle Faktoren außerhalb der Kontroll	Gibt es externe Faktoren (z. B. Ressourcen, Richtlinien, Unterstützung durch andere), die Deine Motivation beeinflussen, eigenständig nachhaltige Initiative zu ergreifen?	Kannst Du eine Situation beschreiben, in der externe Faktoren (wie Ressourcen, Tools, oder Zeitmangel) Deine Fähigkeit, Dich für nachhaltige Praktiken zu engagieren, entweder unterstützt oder behindert haben?	
	Inwiefern kannst Du frei entscheiden, ob und wie Du Dich für Nachhaltigkeit engagierst, ohne dabei äußeren Druck zu verspüren?		
Unterstützung durch das Unternehmen	Welche organisatorischen Faktoren (z. B. Richtlinien, Anreize oder Initiativen) beeinflussen deine Motivation, dich freiwillig für umweltfreundliches Verhalten zu engagieren?	Welche Aspekte der Unternehmensrichtlinien oder -kultur geben Dir das Gefühl, in Sachen Nachhaltigkeit Eigeninitiative ergreifen zu können, und was könnte verbessert werden?	
	Wie verstärken oder begrenzen diese organisatorischen Faktoren Deine Motivation, Dich an Nachhaltigkeitsinitiativen auf der Arbeit zu beteiligen?		
Richtlinien	Wie beeinflussen Unternehmensrichtlinien (z.B. 1h pro Woche auf GoodHabitZ) in Bezug auf Nachhaltigkeit Deine Motivation, Dich freiwillig zu engagieren?	Kannst Du ein Beispiel für eine Richtlinie nennen, die Deine Motivation, Dich für	Wie nehmen Mitarbeitende der Organisation die Rolle der

	Gibt es bestimmte Richtlinien, von denen Du denkst, dass sie hinzugefügt oder verbessert werden könnten, um dein nachhaltiges Engagement besser zu unterstützen?	Nachhaltigkeit einzusetzen, spürbar beeinflusst hat?	Unterstützung durch das Unternehmen wahr, wenn es darum geht, ihre autonome Motivation zur Eigeninitiative in nachhaltigen Praktiken zu stärken und zu erhalten?
Aktivitäten	Welche Aktivitäten oder Initiativen im Unternehmen in Bezug auf Nachhaltigkeit inspirieren Dich, freiwillig aktiv zu werden?	Wie tragen bestimmte Unternehmensaktivitäten oder -veranstaltungen dazu bei, dass Du Dich eher freiwillig für Nachhaltigkeitsbemühungen engagierst – oder auch nicht?	
	Wie effektiv findest du, dass diese Aktivitäten Mitarbeitende zur Teilnahme motivieren?		
Haltungen /Einstellungen	Wie nimmst Du die generelle Haltung des Unternehmens gegenüber Nachhaltigkeit und mitarbeitergeführten Initiativen wahr?	Inwiefern gibt dir die Einstellung/Haltung des Unternehmens zu Nachhaltigkeit das Gefühl, in Deinem freiwilligen Engagement unterstützt oder nicht unterstützt zu werden?	
	Hast Du das Gefühl, dass Führungskräfte oder Kolleg:innen freiwillige Beiträge zur Nachhaltigkeit wirklich wertschätzen? Warum oder warum nicht?		

Interview closing in English (for grading purposes)

Thank you very much for your time! We have now reached the end of our interview. Is there anything else you would like to add or a topic that we may not have covered?

Perfect, that was the last question.

We have now looked at the main objectives, which are: What factors drive autonomous motivation for you as an employee the organization to take the initiative to engage in sustainability practices as part of Voluntary Employee Green Behavior (VEGB), and how do you as an employee perceive the role of organizational support in maintaining and improving these behaviors?

I hope you enjoyed the interview a little and felt comfortable talking about the individual topics.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you again for taking part in this interview and helping me with my research. I appreciate you taking the time to be here with me today.

If you realize that you answered a question differently than you intended, or if you feel uncomfortable sharing your answers from the interview, you can always adjust your answer by reaching out to me.

Then I will stop the audio recording now.

Interview closing in German

Vielen Dank für deine Zeit! Wir sind nun am Ende unseres Interviews angekommen. Gibt es noch etwas, das du ergänzen möchtest oder ein Thema, das wir vielleicht nicht angesprochen haben?

Perfekt, das war dann die letzte Frage.

Wir haben uns nun mit den Hauptzielen befasst, die da lauten: Welche Faktoren fördern die autonome Motivation für dich als Mitarbeiter:in der Organisation, die Initiative zu ergreifen, um sich im Rahmen von Voluntary Employee Green Behavior (VEGB) an Nachhaltigkeitspraktiken zu beteiligen, und wie nimmst du als Mitarbeiter:in die Rolle der organisatorischen Unterstützung bei der Aufrechterhaltung und Verbesserung dieser Verhaltensweisen wahr?

Ich hoffe, das Interview hat dir ein wenig gefallen und du hast dich wohl dabei gefühlt, über die einzelnen Themen zu sprechen. Ich möchte mich an dieser Stelle noch einmal bei dir bedanken, dass du an diesem Interview teilgenommen hast und mir bei meiner Forschungsarbeit geholfen hast. Ich weiß es zu schätzen, dass du dir die Zeit genommen hast, heute mit mir hier zu sein.

Wenn du merkst, dass du eine Frage anders beantwortet hast, als du beabsichtigt hattest, oder wenn es dir unangenehm ist, deine Antworten aus dem Interview zu teilen, kannst du deine Antwort jederzeit anpassen, indem du mich darüber informierst.

Die Tonaufnahme wird nun gestoppt.

Appendix C

Data analysis

Table C1

Codebook including topics derived from literature, corresponding themes, and codes

Topic	# of themes	Theme	# of codes	Codes
Person factors	3	Inspiration for motivation	5	Getting time off by the employer; Habits; Listed products and retailers; Personal knowledge; Inspiration from other employees
		Personal values	9	Choice of employer; Environmental concern; Existing sustainability practices; Future perspective; Interaction with employees; Lifestyle; Motivating others; Global situation; Knowledge-sharing within the organization
		Limits to motivation	12	Daily work; Dependence on management; Financial constraints; Lack of knowledge; Laziness; Negative perception of others; No limits; Setting priorities; Stress; Time constraints; Habits; Remote Working
Context factors	2	External influences	5	Employee-led sustainability initiative; Inspiration from other companies; Internet; Sustainability movement; Global situation
		External pressure	4	Autonomy; Minimum participation level; Push by the organization; Guilt
Organizational factors	5	Activities and incentives	3	Bike inspection; Public protests; Share-shelf
		Change of executive management	3	New executive management; Old executive management; Differentiating
		Corporate culture	5	Authenticity; Communication; Reinforcing motivation; uncertain of corporate culture; Holistic integration of sustainability
		Ideas for improvement	5	Digitize business cards; Improve food diversity; Improve waste management; More offers for remote workers; Need for more guidance from the organization
		Structural support	2	Participation opportunities; Flat hierarchy
Policies	5	Current educational guidelines	2	Educational leave programs; Good Habitz
		Current operational guidelines	3	Holistic integration of sustainability; Sustainable alternative for conventional products; Sustainable mobility option
		Future policy ideas	12	Advised against the implementation of guidelines; Ban disposable food containers; Data transparency; Dedicated days for sustainability; Knowledge-sharing within the organization; Not missing any policy; Possibility to have more policies; Sustainable coffee in the office; Training; Value alignment; Volunteering; Improve waste management
		Guideline perception	2	Employee driven; No impact
		Issues with guidelines	4	Unclear whether guidelines exist; Lack of knowledge about the criteria on the marketplace; Lack of transparency; Lack of using opportunities

Activities	3	Activities discouraging employee participation	4	Frequent calls for public protest in the communication channel; Meeting culture/dynamics; Meetings on economic performance; Town hall meetings
		Activities supporting employee participation	11	Cycling challenge; Depends on daily life; Communal cooking; Positive perception of activities; Bingo; Christmas crafting; Clothing swap; Flea market communication channel; City Clean-Up; Public protests; Warehouse sales
		Initiatives	3	Teams initiating action; Employee-led sustainability initiative; Work council
Attitudes	5	Colleagues attitude towards sustainability	4	Compensating managerial shortcomings; Employees live sustainably; High appreciation; Individual differences
		Managerial attitude towards sustainability	9	Appreciation of sustainability efforts; Different values; Difficulties being sustainable; Lacking sustainability; Passive approach to sustainability; Prioritizing economic performance; Support dependent on convincing argumentation; Supporting sustainability initiatives; Uncertainty of support
		Organizational attitude towards sustainability	5	Holistic integration of sustainability; Organization positioned as sustainability leader; Sustainability as a core organizational value; Employee driven; Knowledge-sharing within the organization
		Organizational attitude supporting employee motivation	3	Current sustainability standards; Supporting all employees; Workplace environment
		Critical reflections on organizational attitude	3	Need for greater external impact; Reliance on the employee-led sustainability initiative; Room for improvement

Table C2*Codes Organized by Theme with Definitions*

Theme	Code	# of quotes	Definitions
Person Factors			
Inspiration for motivation	Getting time off by the employer	5	Designated time provided by the employer inspires employees to explore and act on sustainability-related ideas and projects
	Habits (1)	4	Established routines by employees naturally inspire individuals to take initiative
	Listed products and retailers	2	The products sold; and retailers selling at the marketplace inspire employees to take initiative
	Personal knowledge	1	Understanding environmental issues and knowledge by the individual motivates them to take initiative
	Inspiration from other employees	11	Seeing coworkers take initiative in sustainable actions inspires individuals to also take initiative
Personal values	Choice of employer	6	The importance placed on working for an organization that aligns with one's personal values, especially with regard to environmental and social responsibility
	Environmental concern	8	A personal sense of care and responsibility for the health of the natural environment, especially with regard to climate change, inspiring employees to take initiative
	Existing sustainability practices	3	Recognition and appreciation of current efforts at the organization towards sustainability
	Future perspective	4	A long-term outlook considering the well-being of future generations and the impact of today's actions on ecosystems
	Interaction with employees	11	The influence of open and collaborative communication with colleagues in fostering a shared commitment to sustainability
	Lifestyle	10	Personal lifestyle choices, especially with regards to consumption, that reflect a commitment to sustainability
	Motivating others	1	A value placed on inspiring and encouraging peers to take initiative in sustainability
	Global situation	4	Awareness of global social challenges, particularly the presence of climate change skepticism, fostering a personal sense of responsibility to take initiative toward sustainability
	Knowledge-sharing within the organization	8	The belief in the importance of exchanging information, ideas, and best practices across colleagues and departments to enhance sustainability
Limits to motivation	Daily work	2	Routine in day-to-day work that limit the motivation to take initiative
	Dependence on management	2	Relying on managerial direction which limits the motivation to take initiative
	Financial constraints	2	Monetary resources or constraints limiting the motivation to take initiative
	Lack of knowledge	2	Insufficient knowledge limiting the motivation to take initiative
	Laziness	4	A lack of energy or desire to exert effort limiting the motivation to take initiative
	Negative perception of others	1	Skepticism or criticism by others limiting the motivation to take initiative
	No limits	5	Not feeling limited to take initiative

	Setting priorities	2	Allocating attention to other tasks limiting the motivation to take initiative
	Stress	4	Emotional or mental strain that overwhelms and reduces the capacity to take initiative
	Time constraints	11	Limited availability of time that limits the motivation to take initiative
	Habits (2)	4	Established routines that that limit the motivation to take initiative
	Remote Working	1	Working exclusively from a remote location, which reduces opportunities and motivation to take initiative
Organizational support			
Activities and incentives	Bike inspection	2	An initiative by the organization, where employees can have their bicycles checked or repaired, promoting eco-friendly commuting
	Public protests	3	Support and encouragement from the organization for employees to participate in public protests to advocate for climate action
	Share-shelf	1	A communal space where employees can donate and take reusable items, reducing waste and encouraging sustainable use
Change of executive management	New executive management	8	Recently appointed leadership that brings new priorities, values, or strategies, affecting sustainability action
	Old executive management	5	Long-standing leadership whose established values and practices influence the organization's past and current sustainability efforts
	Differentiating	10	The contrast/shift between old and new management, impacting employee perceptions and engagement on the organization's sustainability
Corporate culture	Authenticity	1	The degree to which the organization's sustainability efforts are perceived as sincere and aligned with its values
	Communication	1	How openly and effectively the organization discusses sustainability goals, actions, and expectations with employees
	Reinforcing motivation	3	Cultural elements that support and strengthen employees' intrinsic motivation to initiate sustainable action
	Uncertain of corporate culture	4	Employee confusion or lack of clarity about the organization's corporate culture
	Holistic integration of sustainability	8	The extent to which sustainability is embedded in all areas of the organization, meaning everyday operations and decision-making
Ideas for improvement	Digitize business cards	2	Replacing traditional printed business cards with digital versions to reduce waste and leveraging modern technology for easier sharing and updating of contact information.
	Improve food diversity	3	Offer a wider range of food options (especially vegetarian options) in the workplace
	Improve waste management	4	Enhancing recycling, composting, and waste-reduction systems to make sustainable choices easier and more accessible for employees
	More offers for remote workers	2	Provide sustainability-related activities and incentives that are accessible to employees who work remote
	Need for more guidance from the organization	4	A desire for clearer instructions, goals, and support from leadership to engage effectively in sustainability.
Structural support	Participation opportunities	5	Chances for employees to actively contribute ideas, projects, or feedback related to sustainability within the organization
	Flat hierarchy	2	A less rigid organizational structure that can empower employees to take initiative and contribute to sustainability
Policies			
Current educational	Educational leave programs	1	Initiatives that allow employees to take time off work to pursue further education or professional development

guidelines	Good Habitiz	1	A program or platform that offers resources or training to help employees develop good habits, particularly in the area of health
Current operational guidelines	Holistic integration of sustainability	8	The extent to which sustainability is embedded in all areas of the organization, meaning everyday operations and decision-making
	Sustainable alternative for conventional products	4	The products sold, and retailers selling at the marketplace, leading to the practice of switching to more sustainable alternatives to traditional products within the organization
	Sustainable mobility option	2	Policies or programs that encourage employees to use environmentally-friendly transportation options
Future policy ideas	Advised against the implementation of guidelines	1	A suggestion to avoid implementing certain guidelines as they are seen as potentially counterproductive
	Ban disposable food containers	1	A suggestion to prohibit the use of single-use plastic or disposable containers for food in the workplace
	Data transparency	2	The need for greater transparency in use of data by the employees and the organization, particularly related to sustainability metrics
	Dedicated days for sustainability	1	Implementing specific days focused entirely on sustainability initiatives, where employees participate in sustainability-related activities or project
	Knowledge-sharing within the organization	8	Encouraging employees to share sustainability-related knowledge, best practices, and ideas across departments to foster collective action and innovation
	Not missing any policy	2	Employees feel that no additional sustainability policies are currently needed
	Possibility to have more policies	2	Employees sense that more sustainability policies could be beneficial, though they lack specific suggestions
	Sustainable coffee in the office	1	A suggestion to only offer sustainable sourced coffee in the office
	Training	7	Offering educational programs or workshops focused on sustainability, ensuring employees are well-equipped with the knowledge and skills needed for sustainable practices
	Value alignment	1	Aligning employee and organizational values, including formal recognition in employment contracts
	Volunteering	1	Encouraging or facilitating employee participation in volunteer work
	Improve waste management	4	Enhancing recycling, composting, and waste-reduction systems to make sustainable choices easier and more accessible for employees
Guideline perception	Employee driven	28	A perception that sustainability (guidelines) are initiated or strongly supported by employees, rather than solely by leadership
	No impact	4	The belief that the existing guidelines or policies have little or no effect on individual sustainability behavior
Issues with guidelines	Unclear whether guidelines exist	7	Employees are unsure whether sustainability guidelines or policies have been established
	Lack of knowledge about the criteria on the marketplace	1	Employees are uninformed about the company's standards or criteria, highlighting a knowledge gap that needs to be addressed
	Lack of transparency	5	Sustainability topics (e.g. wages) are not communicated transparently within the organization, leading to uncertainty
	Lack of using opportunities	4	Employees are aware of sustainability opportunities but are not fully utilizing the options
Activities			
Activities	Frequent calls for	1	Constant or overly forceful calls to action on social platforms may

discouraging employee participation	public protest in the communication channel		overwhelm or alienate employees, reducing genuine engagement
	Meeting culture/dynamics	1	A rigid or unproductive meeting culture draining time and energy, leaving less room for taking initiative
	Meetings on economic performance	1	Focused discussions on financial performance overshadowing sustainability focus, limiting broader engagement
	Town hall meetings	2	Large company-wide meetings are perceived as disengaging when focused primarily on investor interests and new investment
Activities supporting employee participation	Cycling challenge	2	Motivational activity encouraging employees to use bicycles, supporting healthy habits and sustainable commuting
	Depends on daily life	2	Employee participation varies depending on their individual schedules, workloads, and personal responsibilities
	Communal cooking	5	Encourages active participation through shared experiences
	Positive perception of activities	2	Employees view the offered activities as motivating, which encourages participation
	Bingo	10	A social activity with sustainability efforts, that encourages employee initiative through a fun, game-based format
	Christmas crafting	1	A seasonal activity where employees create christmas decorations or gifts sustainably
	Clothing swap	4	An event where employees exchange clothing items to promote reuse and reduce fashion-related waste
	Flea market communication channel	1	An internal communication channel for employees to give away or sell secondhand items, promoting reuse and reducing consumption
	City Clean-Up	2	A local environmental initiative where employees join efforts to clean up public spaces in the city the company is located in
	Public protests	6	A supported team event by the organization for employees to participate in public protests to advocate for climate action
	Warehouse sales	1	Events where leftover or overstocked products are sold for a cheaper price to reduce waste
Initiatives	Teams initiating action	5	Teams within the company actively working on evaluating and improving the company's environmental impact, often bottom-up
	Employee-led sustainability initiative	21	An initiative by the company initiating activities on sustainability, motivating employees to take initiative on sustainability
	Work council	3	Employee-elected body that can support and advocate for employee initiatives
Attitudes			
Colleagues attitude towards sustainability	Compensating managerial shortcomings	1	Employees feel the need to initiate sustainability actions in response to insufficient managerial involvement
	Employees live sustainably	5	Colleagues are seen as integrating sustainable habits into their daily lives
	High appreciation	7	Employees value and express gratitude for sustainability-related efforts and initiatives in the organization
	Individual differences	6	Colleagues differ in how much they care about or act on sustainability
Managerial attitude towards sustainability	Appreciation of sustainability efforts	5	Managers recognize and value employees' contributions to sustainability
	Different values	2	Some managers may hold priorities that conflict with sustainability goals, leading to misalignment with employees
	Difficulties being	1	Managers coming from non-sustainability backgrounds are perceived as

	sustainable		facing challenges in initiating/leading sustainability
	Lacking sustainability	3	The perception that sustainability is not sufficiently present in management's actions or decisions
	Passive approach to sustainability	2	Managers are viewed as reactive or minimally engaged, rather than proactive in promoting sustainability
	Prioritizing economic performance	2	Sustainability is perceived as secondary to financial or performance goals in managerial decision-making
	Support dependent on convincing argumentation	1	Managerial support for sustainability depends on persuasive business cases or data, rather than intrinsic commitment
	Supporting sustainability initiatives	8	Managers enable sustainability initiatives and employee-led actions
	Uncertainty of support	7	Employees are unsure whether they can count on management to endorse or assist sustainability efforts
Organizational attitude towards sustainability	Holistic integration of sustainability	8	Sustainability is embedded across all areas of the organization, not isolated in specific departments or projects
	Organization positioned as sustainability leader	2	The organization is perceived as striving to be at the forefront of sustainability in its industry or sector
	Sustainability as a core organizational value	6	Sustainability is deeply rooted in the organization's mission, guiding decision-making and strategic goals
	Employee driven	28	Sustainability progress is largely led by grassroots employee efforts rather than top-down mandates
	Knowledge-sharing within the organization	8	The organization supports the exchange of sustainability knowledge and best practices among employees and departments
Organizational attitude supporting employee motivation	Current sustainability standards	2	Existing expectations on sustainability guide and support employee participation in sustainability
	Supporting all employees	3	The employees perceive the organizational attitudes as being inclusive, ensuring all employees can engage in sustainability regardless of role or context
	Workplace environment	2	The overall environment in the workplace encourage sustainable thinking and behavior
Critical reflections on organizational attitude	Need for greater external impact	1	Employees believe the organization should expand its sustainability efforts beyond internal operations and influence wider change
	Reliance on the employee-led sustainability initiative	1	The organization is seen as over-relying on an employee-led sustainability initiative to drive sustainability
	Room for improvement	3	A general acknowledgment that, despite efforts, the organization's sustainability performance could be significantly enhanced

The quotes corresponding to each code can be found in the Google Sheet, accessible via the following link:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1GY_raNtwwcBwKKUvWD5vREgjszbtEoo2/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=100294897728190221197&rtpof=true&sd=true

Appendix D

Results

Figure D1 presents the theoretical framework guiding this study, adapted from Norton et al. (2015), and illustrates how it connects to the study's findings. The framework depicts how both personal and contextual factors influence employees' motivational states, which in turn drive Voluntary Employee Green Behavior (VEGB).

The figure incorporates themes derived from the interview data, visually embedding them within the theory. The figure is color-coded for clarity: dark blue represents the underlying theoretical framework, gray indicates themes related to the first research question (RQ1), and turquoise highlights themes related to the second research question (RQ2).

Figure D1

Visual presentation of the themes connected to the theoretical framework

