



Thesis Paper

Discretion of front-line managers at the operational level

*A qualitative study on pro-environment behavior practices in fast-food
restaurants in Sweden*

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Abstract

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Purpose: The purpose of the study is to understand how managerial discretion affects employees' involvement in sustainable practices in fast-food restaurants in Sweden, identify constraints to implementing these practices, and examine their impact across various operational settings and governance structures.

Theory: The concept of planned behavior, norm-activation model, organizational support theory, and transformational leadership theory are employed in this study to fulfill the research purpose and address the research question. Norm-activation model with the theory of planned behavior is used to identify a more comprehensive explanation of pro-environmental behavior by effectively accounting for personal norms. Organizational support theory is applied to analyze organizational support to engage employees in environmental behaviors. Transformation leadership theory identifies organizational leaders' impact on employees' attitudes and commitment.

Method: A qualitative case study has been conducted with 10 semi-structured interviews with the respondents having different roles within fast-food restaurants in Sweden.

Results: Organizations and employees significantly support autonomy, cultivate a culture of sustainability, and actively participate in environmental decision-making. The moral norms, perceived control, and attitudes of employees and managers towards environmental responsibility greatly influence their engagement in sustainable practices. A culture that prioritizes sustainability, backed by management and integrated into the organization's operations, is crucial. Discretionary leadership effectively promotes pro-environmental behaviors by inspiring and intellectually stimulating employees to consider their environmental impacts.

Foreword

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// Md Asike Mehboob & Soumyadeep Paul Chowdhury

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Introduction:

Environmental sustainability has become a major concern due to the increase in CO2 emissions, population growth, and urbanization, which contribute to numerous problems in global ecosystems, public health, and resource depletion (Chen F et al., 2022). Therefore, nowadays, policy formulation and implementation associated with reducing and controlling negative impact on environment are on the top priority in business. According to Goodland et al. (1996), environmental sustainability is considered a non-negotiable foundation for social and economic sustainability. They argue this because environmental sustainability is fundamental to maintaining the planet's life-support systems upon which human and economic activities depend. Moreover, several studies have identified that companies often pursue environmental initiatives for various reasons. These include adhering to regulations, gaining a competitive edge, responding to stakeholder demands, addressing ethical concerns, employer branding, reacting to critical events, and initiatives led by top management. Each of these factors can significantly influence a company's decision to adopt sustainable practices and integrate them into its operations. (Dillon & Fischer, 1992; Lampe, Ellis, & Drummond, 1991; Lawrence & Morell, 1995; Vredenburg & Westley, 1993; Winn, 1995; Bansal et al., 2000). In case of policy formulation, top management may, first and foremost responsible; they make high-level decisions regarding policy, finance, and corporate strategy with strategic discretion focusing on company's vision, mission, and long-term strategy. However, managers are in the position to develop policies maintaining consistency with organizational objectives (Global science research journal, 2022). Nevertheless, middle managers and front-line managers within the organizations exercise operational and administrative discretion to implement and maintain those policies and procedures at the operational level (Hitt, M. A. et al., 1991; Mintzberg, H., 1973).

Similar to other industries, management's concern regarding environmental sustainability in the fast-food industry is now on an upward trend (Arun Madanaguli et al., 2022). It seems completely logical because this industry face allegations of generating substantial wastage and contributing to a significant carbon footprint (Millar et al., 2016). In a larger context, food system in the earth generates 34% of total human-caused greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per year (Nature, 2021). Nevertheless, in today's hectic culture, fast-food has gained popularity due to its availability, accessibility and affordability. With the rise of popularity and population, the size of the fast food market was projected at 701 (USD Billion) globally in 2019 and is predicted to earn

revenue worth 900 (USD Billion) by 2026 (Zion Market Research, 2021; Jekanowski et al., 2001). The negative impacts are linked to the fast-food industry includes food waste, plastic waste, emissions, consuming huge quantities of water and energy and so on (Arun Madanaguli et al., 2022). These issues have increased people's awareness, and their purchasing behaviors have been shifted toward sustainability products (Jang et al., 2011; Pinard et al. 2014). In recent years, many fast food companies have indeed started implementing environmental initiatives. These initiatives range from reducing carbon emissions and water usage to improving packaging sustainability. For example, some companies are partnering with plant-based protein providers to offer more environmentally friendly menu options. Others are focusing on sustainable sourcing practices, reducing waste, and increasing the use of recycled materials in their packaging. These efforts reflect a growing industry trend towards sustainability (Reader's digest, 2023). However, workplace environmental friendly behavior among employees at operational level plays crucial role in fostering sustainable practices within organization which are sometimes overlooked and investigations on it are remain scarce (Chen et al., 2015). This behavior is fundamentally triggered by managers' moral norms, attitudes toward such behavior, motivating leadership skills, and capacity to communicate organizational policy and practices to employees (Tian et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2015; Robertson & Barling, 2013; Renwick et al., 2016). In this research, our main focus is on front-line managers' discretion that influences and shapes employees' environmental friendly behavior.

1.1. Purpose:

The purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of managerial discretion on employees' involvement in environmental sustainable practices in fast-food restaurants in Sweden. These practices are meant to serve as guidelines, which are documented in the company's policy manual to ensure consistency and compliance throughout the organization. Moreover, this study is also for identifying possible constraints which may hinder implementing environmental friendly practices. Apart from that, the purpose also involves drawing above pictures through different operational settings and governance.

1.2. Research questions

Previous studies identified factors that influence engaging in environmental sustainable practices in workplace. To explain it, pro-environmental behavior was introduced to support sustainability which is involved voluntary or through task-related organizational practices (Dada et al., 2023). Pro-environmental behavior can be mentioned as individual's active engagement and efforts to reduce negative impacts on the environment. Some researchers emphasized green practices (eco-friendly practices) through green innovation which relates to environmental practices incorporated into company's policy to guide products, production process, and management (Inoue et al., 2015). Green innovation refers to the development and implementation of new products, processes, services, and technologies that significantly reduce environmental impacts, improve energy efficiency, and promote sustainability (Guinot et al., 2022). However, managers' response to green practices (eco-friendly practices) play a crucial role in establishing pro-environmental behavior (Chou et al., 2012). Besides, the importance of communicating organizational strategic actions to its employees related to sustainability is highlighted by many researchers (Mountfield et al., 2021). Most research examined the discretion of top management including CEOs and top executives of the company, but there is a limited research on the way front-line managers' discretion and individual characteristics shape employees pro-environmental behavior at workplace and implement in day to day activities (Caza, 2011; Kuratko et al., 2005; Scott et al., 2009). Furthermore, there may have some constraints due to personal, organizational, and external factors which we keep it under consideration to explore in our research (López-Cotarelo, J., 2018; Hutchinson et al., 2012; Mountfield et al., 2021). Therefore, the following research question is formulated to achieve our research objective:

- How does the discretion of front-line managers guide employees' pro-environmental behaviors in fast-food restaurants in Sweden?
- What are the constraints to implementing pro-environmental behaviors into practices in the fast-food restaurants in Sweden?

2. Earlier research:

2.1. Pro-environmental behavior can generally be understood as “actions contributing to environmental conservation, or human activity intended to protect natural resources, or at least reduce environmental deterioration” (Lülfes et al., 2013). Moreover, pro-environmental behavior is also perceived as corporate (pro-)environmental behavior, which does not address central aspects of individual behavior within firms. Previous study identified that both organizational and personal factors were found to influence company’s intentions to perform pro-environmental behaviors, which in turn drive their subsequent enactment of the behaviors. Organizational factors indicate individual job responsibilities while individual discretion as personal factor. Kim et al. (2017, p. 235) argues that “a pro-environment motivation for implementing eco-friendly practices is not evident in the hospitality context.” Rather, the authors highlight that in the hospitality industry, implementation of eco-friendly practices is due to the business interests rather than due to an aspiration to protect the environment. Apart from that, Filimonau et al. (2019) emphasize that although there is managerial concern about food waste, it was not seen as a managerial priority. Yet, waste management in hospitality operations is viewed as “mediocre” and has the tendency to undermine the environmental sustainability of global hospitality services (Filimonau, 2021). However, Stern and his colleagues (Dietz et al. 1998; Stern 2000; Stern et al. 1999) suggest three types of pro-environmental behavior which are environmental activism, nonactivist behavior in the public sphere, and private sphere environmentalism. Those types indicate individual’s direct and indirect engagement in green practice movement (Inoue et al., 2015). According to Perramon et al. (2014), fast-food restaurants usually do not treat climate-related efforts as part of a comprehensive business strategy. Instead, they focus on specific actions as voluntary, like saving energy, conserving water, or reducing plastic use in their operations.

A myriad of factors influence the behavior towards the environment, hence adding complexity to the phenomenon. In the prediction of behavioral patterns, the theory of planned behavior has been historically instrumental (Ajzen, 2005). As per the theory, in the prediction of pro-environmental behavior, intention is a principal factor that predicts future behavior. It further highlights the fact that intention is contingent on (a) a person’s attitude towards the behavior, (b) normative aspects (for instance, perceived social demand to perform certain behavior) and (c) perception of behavioral control (the extent of space an individual has to perform the behavior) (Harland et al., 1999).

Morales-Caselles et al. (2021) figured, from a global perspective, one of the leading origins of plastic pollution in the aquatic realm derives from cutleries, packagings, wrapping materials, lids, bottles and so on used in the take-away food and beverage consumptions. It was revealed that a colossal approximate of over 50 percent of marine wastes were generated from such sources. Shockingly enough, take-away related excess and residue accounted for the most commonly found waste encountered on the beaches in Europe (Schweitzer et al., 2018). Aligning the context of this study with the views of Fransson and Gärling (1999), an imperative issue is to comprehend how individuals' environmental orientations are shaped and how they perceive the related concerns, encouraging them to behave responsibly towards the environment. Since the human behavioral patterns unleash strong implications on the quality of the environment (Dada et al., 2023), addressing the environmental challenges is contingent on understanding the triggers of pro-environmental behavior, believed by Lades et al. (2021). Nevertheless, Kim et al. (2017), after a substantial literature scrutiny, unveiled that the hospitality industry lacks pro-environment persuasion required to execute eco-friendly practices. Indeed, it is further criticized that the motives for green practices seldom stem from commercial interest coupled with impression management - as opposed to - pursuing and acting to preserve the environment. In an exploration of managerial approaches to alleviate food wastage in the cafe sector of the United Kingdom, Filimonau et al. (2019) learned that managerial concern regarding the waste management was evident, however, from a discretionary standpoint it was not regarded as a managerial priority. Hence, environmental management in the food-service industry has been labeled as 'substandard', and is inclined towards undermining sustainability aspects looked through the environmental lens - extended by Filimonau (2021). Pro-environmental behaviors often don't offer immediate, obvious benefits to individuals. Instead, the positive effects of these actions are shared by everyone and will be seen in the distant future and at different locations. For instance, choosing to drive instead of using public transportation provides immediate comfort and control but harms future natural resources and air quality, contributing to global warming. This is a social dilemma where short-term personal gains conflict with long-term collective benefits (Harland et al., 1999).

2.2. Managerial discretion in pro-environmental behaviors

The seminal concepts of managerial discretion developed by Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987) serves as the foundation of this study. As per their standpoints, managerial discretion could be defined as the latitude of action a manager has that affects the organisational outcomes. A riveting revelation refers to the fact that discretion is different from action or choice, rather, freedom of action is what discretion emphasizes on. As Caza (2012) argued, an individual's choice out of the available options and the effect of that choice is a consequence of discretion, and not part of discretion. Hence, managerial discretion is the delineation of flexibility that managers should operate in the most appropriate manner (Hambrick and Finkelstein, 1987; Caza, 2011).

An action is determined by discretion, where it encounters influence from three distinct forces: internal organization factor, task environment, and managerial characteristics. Internal organization factors consist of organizational culture, age, size, and available resources alongside the pattern of interpersonal relationships among employees. Meanwhile, the task environment encompasses factors such as the structure and growth rate of the industry, product differentiation levels, amount of competitors, and levels of regulatory or political constraints. Managerial characteristics encounter factors like confidence levels and aspiration levels, tolerance to ambiguity, interpersonal skills and the commitment towards strategic outcomes (Wangrow et al., 2015). In a specific condition, the flexibility to act depends on the individual - irrespective of rank and functional position - although the domain and extent of discretion may vary amongst individuals. Interestingly, Caza (2011), and Carpenter and Golden (1997) hold the notion that perceived managerial discretion (individual's perception on flexibility) has the potential to influence managerial discretion. Hence, managerial discretion is not merely influenced by objective managerial discretion that revolves around the formal organisational structure. In relation to the tactics employed to translate the formulated strategy, Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) demonstrate that organisational performance can be influenced by the social capital owned by the middle management. Accordingly, middle and front-line managers' influence towards the upward levels could be increased by the social capital of reputation, whereas, the impact of their performance on downward influence could be increased by the social capital of information. This competence of middle and front-line management to influence the hierarchical stages in the strategy execution process is suspected to relate to managerial discretion.

Managers with greater discretion often have more freedom to innovate and implement sustainable practices. They can make strategic decisions that not only comply with environmental regulations but also go beyond compliance to embrace more progressive environmental practices. This can include practices like waste reduction, energy efficiency, water conservation, and sustainable sourcing of food and materials. Furthermore, managers with discretion in pro-environmental practices can significantly influence the behavior of employees and the overall organizational culture. By setting an example and creating policies that prioritize environmental sustainability, managers can encourage employees to adopt similar behaviors and attitudes (Amir et al., 2022; Mountfield et al., 2021). According to Wangrow et al., managerial discretion determines long-term goals and implements courses of action from strategic point of view. Although internal and external pressures are not overlooked but still managers' chosen strategies have significant impact to foster and develop organizational culture, people engagement toward certain behavior, and organizational policy formulation related to firm's goals & objectives (Wangrow et al., 2015). However, complex, established, merged, franchise, multinational companies etc. have multitude of forces that constrain or enhance the scope of managerial discretion. That 3 forcers (task environment, internal organizational factor, and managerial characteristics) mentioned by Wangrow et al. that determine a manager's latitude of action. Therefore, it is important to identify and understand the way managerial discretion shape employees' attitude toward a certain behavior in different organizational settings even considering corporate governance in high discretion industries (e.g., foods/beverages) or low discretion industries (e.g., public utilities) (Wangrow et al., 2015).

In our research, we are not analyzing the degree of autonomy that managers have in their discretion. Instead, we focus on understanding how managerial discretion impacts the implementation of sustainable practices formulated by top level management within the organization. It is about the discretion a front-line manager has when he or she is supposed to administrate. Nevertheless, in this paper, we have chosen fast-food restaurant among other high discretion industries to analysis managerial discretion influencing employees' pro-environmental behaviors which is still an underexplored area.

Interestingly, directives from the CEOs and managers in the top hierarchy act as internal drivers and initiate a top-down approach. To execute environmental strategy successfully, one of the prerequisites is the higher management's positive outlook and commitments toward

environmental initiatives, as demonstrated by substantial literature (Andersson & Bateman, 2000; Bansal & Roth, 2000; Karim, 2007). In our research, our primary focus is on front-line managers who not only supervise non-managerial employees but also handle additional managerial tasks. These managers bridge the gap between higher management and operational staff by implementing policies, ensuring safety compliance, managing performance, providing training, and facilitating communication. Their direct interaction with employees allows them to shape work culture, engagement, and productivity, making their role crucial for the organization's effectiveness (Townsend et al., 2022). This study focuses on how this top-down approach extends and materializes amongst the operational-level employees, capitalized by managerial discretion. The riveting findings from a qualitative research undertaken by Tzschentke (2008) displayed the fact that personal environmental ethics of the managers played a noteworthy role while initiating environmental initiatives.

2.3. Constraints in implementing pro-environmental behaviors

It has already been mentioned earlier regarding fast-food industry's contribution to deforestation, food waste, and plastic pollution, and numerous carbon emission. Although large company like McDonalds, Burger King, KFC, PizzaHut, Taco Bell, Starbucks have taken initiatives to develop carbon reduction plans (Busby, M., 2019; Scott, M., 2019) but according to Hutchinson et al. (2012), the environmental agenda of the fast-food industry is far from being ambitious. This industry either lacking to include requirements for carbon footprint reduction or unable to develop carbon reduction targets (Hutchinson et al., 2012). The possible reason may be various obstacles related to implementing pro-environmental behavior. For instance, previous research shows that managers sometimes hesitate to implement sustainable measures due to financial pressure. Apart from that a lack of evidence of the outcome of that investment might be the reason of hindering implementation pro-environmental behaviors. Furthermore, sustainability practices must be aligned with the formal business strategy which managers have to articulate first and communicate to the internal and external environment of the company and lack of such initiatives may cause barrier in implementing pro-environmental behavior (Mountfield et al., 2021).

Many employees may not be fully aware of the environmental impact of their actions or the importance of environmental sustainable practices. Insufficient training programs further

exacerbate this issue, leaving employees without the necessary knowledge to implement pro-environmental behaviors effectively (Adeel M et al., 2022). Moreover, fast-food restaurants often operate under tight profit margins, which can limit the resources available for sustainability initiatives. Therefore, economic measures become vital for managers and profit maximization becomes a top priority (Xiao Y et al., 2022). Apart from that the extent to which managers support and prioritize sustainability can significantly influence employee behavior. Without strong leadership and commitment from managers, employees are less likely to adopt and maintain pro-environmental practices (Iftikhar U. et al., 2021). Adeel M et al. (2022) also mentioned that the fast-paced environment of fast-food restaurants can make it difficult to implement and maintain sustainable practices consistently. High employee turnover rates also mean that new staff must be continually trained, which can be resource-intensive. Furthermore, Xiao Y et al. (2022) emphasized on cultural and behavioral resistance which stated that the possibility of resistance to change among employees can not be overlooked by managers. They are accustomed to established ways of working and changing long-standing habits and practices requires continuous effort and reinforcement from management.

These constraints highlight the need for comprehensive strategies that include employee education, strong managerial commitment, and adequate resources to overcome the challenges and effectively implement pro-environmental behaviors in the fast-food industry. However, limited research on this issue sparked our interest to explore.

3. Theoretical approach

The concept of planned behavior, norm-activation model, organizational support theory, and transformation leadership theory are employed in this study to achieve the objectives and address the research question. The concept of planned behavior is particularly useful in predicting how people will behave based on their pre-existing attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. According to Harland et al., (1999), the theory of planned behavior is prominent in several behavioral domains, which assumes that behavioral intention is the most significant predictor of future behavior. However, Lülfs and Hahn (2013) contend that integrating the norm-activation model with the theory of planned behavior provides a more comprehensive explanation of pro-environmental behavior by effectively accounting for personal norms. The norm-activation model helps to explain the psychological processes behind voluntary

environmental actions, which are not motivated by external rewards but by internal moral obligations. In case of organizational support theory, Cantor et al. (2012) argue that this theory offers a framework for comprehending how organizations can enhance employee engagement in environmental behaviors. Finally, transformation leadership theory identifies organizational leaders impact on various traditional outcomes, including employee attitudes, commitment, as well as organizational performance. Additionally, their influence extends to diverse areas like safety and environmental performance. Robertson et al. (2013) suggest that transformational leadership, when directed towards promoting pro-environmental initiatives, enables leaders who are specifically focused on environmental issues to positively influence their employees' passion for and behaviors toward environmental sustainability.

The theories discussed above explore both organizational and personal factors to analyze and understand how pro-environmental behaviors are adopted by employees within the fast-food restaurant context. These behaviors are influenced by a range of elements including managers' intentions, personal norms, and attitudes. By examining how these factors interact, we can see how leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership, encourage employees to engage in environmentally responsible practices. Additionally, the Norm Activation Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior provide insights into how personal norms and perceived behavioral controls, shaped by organizational policies and culture, motivate employees towards sustainable actions. This comprehensive analysis helps elucidate the complex dynamics through which organizational environments and individual predispositions foster eco-friendly behaviors among employees.

3.1. The concept of planned behavior

Planned behavior is a psychological theory that explains human behavior based on individuals' intentions to engage in that behavior. This concept was developed by Icek Ajzen as an extension of the earlier Theory of Reasoned Action by Ajzen and Fishbein in the 1980s, which is particularly useful in predicting how people will behave based on their pre-existing attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, I., 1991). The concept was studied by Lulfs and Hahn's (2013) which illustrates conceptualizing the principal drivers of voluntary pro-sustainability behavior among the employees. The author further emphasized on several behavioral domains, which take into account the antecedents of the foregoing three core theories of planned

behavior (attitudes towards the behavior, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control) while explaining and predicting behavioral intentions using the theory of planned behavior. Lulfs and Hahn's (2013) conceptualize that, the determinants of voluntary pro-environmental behavior in the work setting consist of a set of distal predictors (i.e., personal moral norm, attitudes and perceived behavioral control). Consequently, these influence the intentions, while habits play the role of moderating factors for the relationship between intention and pro-environmental behavior. However, according to Ajzen, I. (1991), **attitude toward the behavior** refers to the individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing the behavior. It is influenced by beliefs about the outcomes of the behavior and evaluations of these outcomes. If a person believes that the behavior will lead to positive outcomes or wellbeing, this constitutes a favorable attitude towards engaging in the behavior. Similarly, **subjective norm** involves the perceived social pressures to perform or not perform the certain behavior. **perceived behavioral control** pertains to the individual's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior. This perception is influenced by past experiences and anticipated obstacles. Higher perceived control over the behavior typically increases the likelihood that an individual will intend to perform the behavior and actually do so.

3.2. Norm-activation model

Norm Activation Model is a significant theoretical framework in social psychology that explains the process by which individuals are motivated to take pro-social actions, particularly those that are altruistic or environmentally beneficial. Developed by Schwartz in the early 1970s, this model seeks to elucidate the conditions under which people act according to their personal norms, particularly in the context of helping behavior and environmental conservation. Lulfs and Hahn (2013) argue that integrating the Norm Activation Model with the Theory of Planned Behavior provides a more comprehensive explanation of pro-environmental behavior, particularly through a better accounting of personal norms. The authors clarify that the Norm Activation Model posits personal norms as central to moral behavior, which must be activated through a preceding norm-activation process (Dada et al., 2023). In studying the pro-environmental attitudes, and how those could be influenced, Ertz et al., (2016) stress the significance of exploring the contextual factors that may facilitate or hinder pro-environmental behavior. Such contextual factors could consist of objective factors like public policy, norms, regulations, costs, monetary incentives

alongside the subjectively perceived factors like perceived availability of time and resources to act sustainably, perceived capacity to enact certain behavior.

3.3. Organizational support theory

The organizational support theory, as argued by Cantor et al., (2012), supplies a basis to understand how organizations could achieve enhanced engagement from their employees in relation to environmental behavior. It is suggested by the theory that employees would potentially act in the interest of the organization to the degree that the organization is perceived to intend to reciprocate with appropriate training, leadership, and rewards. According to the findings by Cordano and Frieze (2000), environmental performances could potentially be impeded by the extensive communication barriers within the organization. Wesselink et al., (2017) illustrated that positive signals could be provided to the employees as a means to encourage green behavior by communicating green policies and demonstrating environmental leadership. The debate of sustainability invokes changes and challenges in various organizational domains, and in order to achieve this, it is inevitable that the technical and administrative skills are developed alongside values and attitudes and values with unambiguous long-term focus (Dunphy et al., 2000). In relations to the stakeholders, 'respect' is a basic assumption, however, the employees (the internal stakeholders) are seldom overlooked. 'Openness' is related to the awareness of the environment. Renwick, Redman and Maguire emphasize on integrating the literature on environmental management (EM) with the research on human resources management. A major theme in the literature of EM is that, merely changing the raw materials, products or production processes would not deliver effective outcomes. Such outcomes are dependent upon modification in the corporate culture, in the sense that organizations nurture deeply embedded values that support sustainability on a long-term basis. An organizational culture that encourages environmental management is one that persuades and stimulates employees to recommend activities towards environmental improvement, alongside giving them the space and freedom to engage in such activities. In essence, employees ought to be well informed of environmental concerns that affect the workplace, and wider employee engagement in EM proved to cultivate such supportive cultures.

3.4. Transformation leadership theory

Transformational Leadership Theory is a model of leadership that focuses on the relationships between leaders and followers, aiming to inspire and motivate followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity (Bass., 1985). This theory was initially introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 and later expanded by Bernard M. Bass, who added more depth to the concept, particularly around the ways leaders can engage and transform their teams. Transformational leadership influences diverse behaviors and environmentally-specific transformational leadership is among them. However, this leadership style includes four behaviors which includes: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Robertson et al., 2013).

3.4.1. Idealized influence

It emphasizes the importance of leaders acting as role models by prioritizing what is morally right over what is merely expedient. This concept involves leaders influencing their employees by demonstrating a strong commitment to both their followers and the broader collective good. Specifically, when displaying idealized influence, leaders are motivated by a commitment to environmental sustainability. They actively make ethical choices that promote practices beneficial to the natural environment. Such actions by environmentally-focused transformational leaders set a powerful example for their subordinates, making it more likely that these team members will also engage in environmentally responsible behaviors.

3.4.2. Inspirational motivation

Leaders who excel in inspirational motivation have a profound ability to elevate their employees' ambitions beyond personal interests towards the collective good. These leaders inspire their subordinates by channeling their own passion and optimism, empowering them to overcome psychological barriers and external challenges. By doing so, they motivate their team members to transcend self-interest and engage in actions that are beneficial to the natural environment.

3.4.3. Intellectual stimulation

Leaders characterized by their intellectual stimulation promote an environment where employees are encouraged to think independently, challenge established assumptions, and tackle problems innovatively. Specifically, in the context of promoting environmental sustainability, such leaders motivate their subordinates to independently reflect on environmental challenges, critically assess long-standing practices regarding their personal and organizational environmental impact, and seek innovative solutions to these issues.

3.4.4. Individualized consideration

Finally, Leaders who demonstrate individualized consideration show empathy and concern for the well-being of their employees, and assist in the development of their skills and potential. By doing so, these leaders cultivate close relationships with their followers, creating a conducive environment for imparting their environmental values, modeling sustainable behaviors, and challenging existing environmental assumptions and priorities. Essentially, through environmentally-focused transformational leadership, such leaders strategically leverage their relationships with subordinates to actively promote and encourage engagement in pro-environmental behaviors within the workplace (Robertson et al., 2013).

This theory can be further elaborated by a conceptual model adapted from the one developed by Lunfs and Hahn (2013). In this aspect, we can also integrate the theory of planned behavior and norm-activation model. Combining both concept can be best used to explain adapting pro-environmental behavior. According to the model (*Appendix - 3*), we have mentioned a multi-determinant approach by integrating the theory of planned behavior, norm activation model, and the contextual determinants and habits. Among them, planned behavior and norm activation mainly focus on individual motivations which influence individuals to foster pro-environmental behavior. Moreover, personal norms, one of the motivational determinants in our model, are evolved and learned through shared expectations in social interactions. Among other determinants of the model, perceived supervisory support (guided by distal predictors such as code of conduct or guidelines) plays vital role to shape intention of the employees to perform pro-environmental behavior. Employees are later motivated if it is rewarded by supervisors. Therefore, we incorporate supervisory support as a behavioral control factor to impact pro-environmental behavioral

intentions (Lülfes et al., 2013). Thus leaders with transformational characteristics focused on individualized consideration by encouraging employees working under his or her supervision.

4. Method

This section encompasses a range of topics and approaches aimed at collecting and analyzing data to achieve the goal of this research. At first research design and the case companies are elaborated. Subsequently, data collection is described through sampling strategy, structure of interviews, and interview guideline. Data analysis is presented thereafter which is followed by ethical consideration, and research limitation at last.

4.1. Research design

In our research to understand how managerial discretion influences employees' pro-environmental behaviors in fast-food restaurants in Sweden and possible constraints, we have employed qualitative research method. The interview guide and data analysis were drawn upon prior research and relevant theories through a deductive approach. Qualitative research method, as described by Williams and Schaefer in 2013, is effective in grasping individuals' perspectives and motivations. The preference for qualitative methods in fast-food restaurant research has been growing, as evidenced by studies from Altinay et al. (2013), Perrigot et al. (2021), and Watson et al. (2020), as well as in research focusing on environmental practices, such as that by Lin et al. (2019). However, our methodology is involved conducting semi-structured interviews, consisting of open-ended questions, with managers and other employees operating fast food establishments in Sweden. Flexibility, interactive, and generative nature of semi-structured interview are instrumental in obtaining in-depth and nuanced understandings of participants' experiences and perspectives. Moreover, this is inherently interactive which can uncover richer, more detailed insights into participants' experiences and viewpoints. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, as the standard tool of in-depth interview, are designed to capture the richness and diversity of human behavior and thought, offering invaluable insights that extend beyond the capabilities of more structured data collection methods (Ritche, Jane et al., 2014). All questions are mentioned in the interview guidelines (*Appendix 2*) which are a bit different for managers and other employees working under his/her supervision. These are formulated separately to understand

managerial discretions and contribution in policy formulation in environmental sustainability, attitudes toward pro-environmental behavior (both managers and other employees including frontline employees), and the difference between planned behavior and the actual implementation. These interview guides were applied to focus the interview on the topics of interest without imposing a rigid structure, facilitating a deeper understanding of the participant's perspectives and experiences (Flick, 2014).

4.2. Case company

Case study has been carried out in two different type of reputed chains of fast-food restaurants in terms of business model. Between them, 'A' is family owned Swedish company which has been operating its business mainly through company-owned restaurants for many many years and another one 'B' is a global franchise, has been operating as fast-food chain for many many years mainly through franchisees, and mix of company-owned and joint ventures. Both companies have been established their business in different countries. In our case, we have considered them in the context of Sweden. Swedish company 'A' is considered as an environmentally sustainable restaurant according to "Sustainable Brand Index 2023" official report. Moreover, their aim is to tackling the climate crisis on a larger scale. Another company 'B', on the other hand, is also considered as sustainable in terms of sustainable practices emphasizing on reducing climate impact. Furthermore, we have chosen these two types of business model (national and multinational based) operating fast-food restaurant chain due to understanding the managers' discretionary impact on employees' behavior in different governance and operational settings. However, we chose Sweden as our research setting for several reasons. Sweden has a notable history in environmental sustainability, actively integrating business and sustainability practices. Several factors like renewable energy, waste management, green transport (eco-friendly transport), environmental governance, and environmental awareness have contributed to this reputation (EPI, 2022). This country emphasizes green growth driven by technical innovation, rather than considering it as a risk. Sweden's approach to environmental sustainability showcases a model where safeguarding the environment and societal development are part of the same challenge, setting a precedent for other countries to follow in addressing global sustainability issues (Sweden, ndf). In a broader context, the fast-food industry has faced scrutiny for its environmental and nutritional issues. Other first world countries' fast-food chains have been introducing more

environmentally-friendly packaging, recycling initiatives, and lower fat products. These changes are not only a response to public and media criticism but also represent a competitive advantage over smaller domestic fast-food companies. The industry's response demonstrates an evolving awareness and action towards environmental sustainability (Price et al., 1992). Overall, the research and industry trends suggest a growing emphasis on sustainability within the fast-food sector, influenced by a combination of managerial decisions, market pressures, and evolving consumer expectations.

4.3. Data collection

We have collected data for our research by conducting 10 semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions that lasted 30-45 minutes each (*Appendix 2*). Our qualitative approach facilitated in capturing individuals' own understanding of their engagement and motives. In contrast to following a fixed format of questionnaire, these interviews concentrate on a suggested topic guide that usually contains a limited number of open-ended questions. In order to facilitate optional probing, these questions were followed by bulleted points. Consequently, as believed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), this facilitated the active engagement of the interviewees with the interviewees to reach below the layers of social desirability and self-presentation. Specifically, in-depth interview, which is also considered as a form of conversation according to Kvale and Brinkman, 2009 and Lofland et al., 2006, with managers and other employees working under managers' supervision separately facilitated to access and acquires their pre-existing knowledge or view about environmental sustainability. Moreover, it seemed more appropriate as the interviewees are team members and they could share their day to day activities in detail which can be then filtered into related outcomes associated with the objective of the research (Ritchie et al., 2014). Typically, the secondary sources of data have been extracted from the published organizational reports, websites, and associated publications.

4.3.1. Sampling strategy and participants

The research objective involves specific case study which needs more detailed information. Therefore, purposive sampling has been employed to gain deep insights rather than to generalize findings. The reason behind choosing is that purposive sampling in qualitative research refers to a

strategy where participants are selected based on specific characteristics or criteria that align with the objectives of the study. It was able to allow us to focus on specific traits that are a central theme to our research (Ritchie et al., 2014). Thus, this approach was used to identify managers' intentions and attitudes toward pro-environmental behavior to implement environmental sustainable practices and influence their fellow members and subordinates.

Considering the objective of the research, we selected participants from the fast-food restaurants which has been mentioned below:

- Managers
- Shift leaders, restaurant assistant/ kitchen staff

Managers are selected based on their experience within the same fast-food restaurant. Additionally, the rest of the staff is comprised of both newly recruited employees and those who have been working at the restaurant for a long time. As our research on managerial discretion, therefore, we have chosen front-line managers especially those who have a certain year of experience in the same fast-food restaurants. These managers directly supervise employees at operational level. Besides they also oversee additional managerial tasks (Townsend et al., 2022). In case of fast-food restaurant, restaurant manager or kitchen manager will be the perfect match for our research. They hold the primary responsibility for overseeing recruitment, training, operations, and overall functioning. This role involves adhering to compliance and regulations (Maulik Pandya, 2022).

In relation to desired experience of those managers for our research, we initially conducted two pilot interviews to understand managers' job specifications (including year of experience and knowledges) and understand the quality of the interview guideline. By doing this, we came to know that restaurant managers or restaurant kitchen managers who have at least 6 years of experience in total in the same organization would be the best fit as respondents for our research. We also came to know about the restaurants' practice that a good performer is usually promoted as a manager within 4 to 5 years and he or she needs at least 3 to 6 months to cope up overall job responsibilities. Within one year in the position as a manager, a person becomes familiar with the activities, training, and policy formulation related to environmental sustainability. In this stage, it becomes relatively easy to get an idea regarding the way managers spread their environment-friendly attitudes, thoughts, and fascinations among their colleagues and subordinates. However,

we considered two different company in our study as fast-food restaurants in order to examine the research question. Approximately 3 to 5 employees including manager in each restaurant were interviewed.

4.3.2. *Structure and process of interviews*

As the interview is semi-structured with open ended question, the conversation begun by asking interviewees about their general thoughts on environmental issues to ascertain their sensitivity to environmental matters. Participants would be presented with the questions to explore the types of incumbent green practices, autonomy over such environmental initiatives, their impacts, and how managerial persuasions shape those processes. It could provide an in-depth understanding of the research question and accomplish the research objectives (Ritchie et al., 2014). We have adopted a *responsive interviewing* style that underscores the significance of establishing a trusting relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, fostering a more interactive conversation. This approach is more accommodating than other styles, featuring minimal confrontation. It allows the personalities of both the interviewer and interviewee to influence the questioning, and necessitates a mutual level of reciprocity from both parties (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 241). We mostly carried out *face-to-face* form of interview, because this has long been favored for establishing a solid rapport between the researcher and the participant. This method facilitates an environment where the interviewee can respond freely and thoroughly, while allowing the researcher to consider non-verbal communication (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 242). However, we also conducted digital interviews two times through video conference platform like zoom and google meet considering the distance from Gothenburg city center.

All interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes each. Face-to-face interviews typically allowed us for better rapport building and more natural interaction due to physical presence and non-verbal cues. This leads to richer, more nuanced data. However, digital interviews was also effective in building rapport, especially when we used video, as they still allow for some level of visual interaction (Deakin et al., 2014).

4.3.3. Interview guideline

Creating an interview guideline for our study on "Managerial Discretion on Environmental Sustainability" in a qualitative research setting involves developing questions that explore how management decisions and leadership styles influence the adoption and effectiveness of environmental sustainability practices by the other employees within organizations. Moreover, it also entails formulating questions that explore participants' attitudes, behaviors, and experiences related to sustainability practices. The interview guideline is mentioned in *Appendix 2* which consists of 21 questions. Those questions are categorized into 7 categories which are Demographic Questions, Attitudes Towards Environmental Sustainability, Personal and Organizational Practices, Influence and Motivation, Perceived Barriers, Future Perspectives, and Concluding Questions. We had started our in-depth interview as a form of conversation which was related to interviewees' professional roles to understand their responsibilities in their organization. Our participants are basically divided into two categories (Managers and Frontline Employees), therefore, it was important to know their position. After that, we put our focus on managers' attitudes and perceptions towards sustainability, because, their characteristics and intentions affect organizational practices and cultures related to environmental sustainability (Delmas et al., 2004, 2008). Furthermore, we emphasized on individual and organizational initiatives taken to promote sustainability. However, issues related to the challenges were not overlooked, rather we tried to identify through discussion and observation on site. After that we put focus on organizational factors related to engaging or practicing sustainable practices to measure supports that organization provide to its employees. Interview questions related to future perspectives entail planned behavior of the participants. The final question, which served as the closing question, aimed to wrap up the interview and gather information that we had not previously addressed.

4.4. Data analysis

Our analysis aimed at uncovering patterns, themes, or insights from qualitative data. We closely examined the data to identify common themes, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly. We transcribed interviews word by word and analyzed them through a thematic analysis. We choose this analysis method, because in qualitative research within social sciences, thematic analysis is highly valued for its flexibility and ability to derive meaning-based patterns

(themes) from interview transcripts. This method is particularly effective for exploring people's views, experiences, or values, providing deep insights into the data collected through a systematic coding process that identifies significant themes across the dataset (Ritchie et al, 2014; Flick, 2014; Scribbr, 2019). We applied thematic analysis to identify patterns within the data that are relevant to the research question, offering a structured approach to interpreting complex data sets. It allowed us to organize and describe our collected data set in rich detail and is particularly useful in our qualitative research where data can be varied and abundant. By identifying themes, we can construct a narrative that captures the essence of the data in relation to our research question or objectives. This method facilitated the exploration of similarities and differences across a data set, enhancing the understanding of the phenomenon of our study from various perspectives (Flick, 2014). However, we also kept in mind that thematic analysis requires a careful consideration of what themes represent within the context of the study and an awareness of the researcher's own epistemological and theoretical positions. This method is not about taking data at face value but involves a deeper level of interpretation and analysis, making it a valuable tool in qualitative research for uncovering insights and understandings that may not be immediately apparent.

In a nutshell, our analytical strategy for the qualitative data consists of four stages: management of the data, condensation of the data, displaying the data, and verification of conclusions (Patton, 2015). In order to safeguard the confidentiality aspects, final transcriptions were detached from individual identities before beginning the analysis. From the data condensation perspective, a conventional challenge was to establish the right balance amongst fidelity to the rhythm and texture of original language and clarity of the final translation in the language of analysis. We exercised our discretion regarding which terms should be translated and which were kept in the vernacular. Qualitative data potentially Displayed which ranges from full verbatim interview transcripts to distilled summaries of interview notes. In this regard, an 'overview chart' as a display format could be effective as this permits simplified and systematic comparison of results. Finally, we were mindful of the fact that the analysis of the qualitative data was ideally an interactive and iterative process.

4.5. About quality

In addressing the quality of our qualitative research, it is crucial to focus on concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity rather than traditional metrics such as reliability and validity. These concepts are particularly apt for evaluating the nuances inherent in studying social constructs.

To ensure the trustworthiness of our study, we adhere to four key criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) that reflect our commitment to a rigorous qualitative inquiry (Bryman, 2016, p. 384). These criteria are outlined comprehensively and serve as a foundational framework for assessing the integrity and applicability of our findings:

4.5.1. Credibility

This criterion parallels internal validity which concerns the believability of the research findings from the perspective of the participants. We engage deeply with the data to enhance credibility, employing strategies such as prolonged engagement. These approaches ensure that the findings are a true representation of the phenomena under investigation. In our research, we have approached credibility through respondent validation or member validation. To make sure respondent validation, we typically presented their interpretations or findings to the participants and asked them to confirm whether those reflect their views and experiences. We consider the collected data is credible while their interpretations are aligned with what they are intended to mean.

4.5.2. Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of our research can be generalized to other contexts. We facilitate this by providing rich, thick descriptions of the research context and the processes involved. This detailed reporting allows other researchers and practitioners to evaluate the potential applicability of the results to other settings. In qualitative research, it is usual that the main focus is on a smaller group of identical people rather than a large variety. For instance, in our case, we have focused on employees of fast-food restaurants, which are a specific

part of the food industry specializing in the restaurant sector. This might be less applicable in other part of restaurant sector. Therefore, to make our outcomes more reliable and easier for others to follow, we provided detail specifications of our participants and research methods in detail. This approach allows researchers to portray the phenomena in richer detail and helps others understand behaviors in their specific cultural and social context which Bryman (2016) mentioned in his books as *thick description*.

4.5.3. Dependability

For dependability, we maintained and included detailed documentation of the research process and methodological decisions. To make qualitative research dependable, it is crucial to be transparent. This entails a clear presentation of the way of selecting participants and the way of analysis (Bryman. 2016, p. 384-386). In our research, we have maintained transparency by following the above mentioned conditions as well as the way we have collected and recorded data with transcription keeping the ethical guidelines in our mind. This transparency allows our research process to be auditable by others, which enhances its dependability and, in turn, its trustworthiness.

4.5.4. Confirmability

Confirmability in research refers to the ability to show that the researcher has acted honestly and not let personal biases or preferences influence the study. Although achieving complete objectivity is not possible, the researcher should demonstrate that the research was conducted fairly and the results are unbiased. Lincoln and Guba suggest that one way to ensure this is by having auditors review the research process and outcomes to verify their integrity (Bryman. 2016, p. 386). To achieve confirmability, we engage in reflexivity—constantly reflecting on our assumptions, values, and biases and how they might influence the research process. We also sought reflections from our peers who reviewed our work critically in different seminars arranged by our *Course Leader*, helping to ensure that our findings are shaped by the respondents and the data, not by our predispositions.

By rigorously applying these criteria, we aim to ensure that our research is not only robust and rigorous but also resonates with the authenticity and complexity of real-world social phenomena. This approach underscores our commitment to producing reliable and meaningful qualitative research that can inform and guide future scholarly and practical endeavors.

4.6. Ethical consideration

According to Vetenskapsrådet, research ethics concerns making sure that we conduct research responsibly and consider the implications of our work on the people involved and the broader society. Researchers strive to balance the quest for knowledge with the need to protect individuals from harm and respect their integrity. This includes handling sensitive information responsibly and ensuring that the rights of everyone involved are protected. Furthermore, it also involves with good research practice which encapsulates the ethical standards researchers must meet. It includes being honest, accountable, and respectful in all stages of research, from planning to publishing. As a researcher, we must ensure the quality and integrity of our work, respect all participants and accept accountability for the impact of our research (Vetenskapsrådet, n.d.f). Bryman (2016) emphasizes key ethical principles vital for conducting qualitative research responsibly and with respect for participant rights and dignity. To maintain the notion, we fully informed participants about what the research entails, and their role. All Participants were informed about their voluntary participation, and they can leave the study at any time without any consequences. All employees of the restaurants including managers had the choice to conduct the interviews digital or face-to-face. Moreover, We also ensured the participants to protect participant privacy by keeping their identities confidential and handling data securely. The information we collected was used strictly for research purposes and was not disclosed in any way that could identify participants. This means keeping not just names confidential but also any other details that could identify them. We also described to the interviewees about the transcription of the overall interview. Moreover, they were also informed that the interview session would be recorded and they might also stop the interview at any time.

4.7. Research limitations and criticism of sources

Despite employing a qualitative approach, this study is not bulletproof to limitations as the approach may limit the generality of the findings of the empirical investigation. As the model of pro-environmental behaviour illustrated in this study has been qualitatively derived, it could be tested in future research that may utilise large-scale quantitative research. In this regard, the exploration of effective moderators and mediators between attitudes towards pro-environmental behavior and the actual behavior performed by employees is crucial. Identifying these factors can help bridge the gap between intention and action. Moreover, the interviews engaged the managers and the employees at the operations-level.

However, the first limitation we faced was about fixing the schedule with the respondents. Specially our main struggling was related to the proper engagement with managers as they were engaged in various issues. Moreover, the respondents were extremely reluctant to take part in face to face interview. The number of in-depth interviews conducted was lower than anticipated. Therefore, the relatively small number of participants, totaling 10, represents a limitation in our study. Apart from that, some respondents were unable to talk and understand English which made them less engaged in our conversation.

5. Result

The empirical findings are presented in this section which are basically extracted from the themes, codes, and insights, identified during data analysis. Those are analyzed based on participants' thoughts, ideas, experiences, foresight, judgements, and so on. In this section, the results are presented in the form of direct quotes, summaries of conversations, descriptions of observed behaviors, and thematic statements collected from the interviews. This has been done to enhance clarity and provide evidence for interpretations. Most importantly, results in our research involve interpreting the data within the context of the research questions and the theoretical framework established in earlier sections. Apart from that we can elaborate our findings by the conceptual model (*Appendix - 3*) adapted from the one developed by Lunfs and Hahn (2013). For more clarity, we have presented results in three different parts or subsections. The first part describes *Personal and Organizational Factors in Pro-environmental Behavior* which entails individuals' norms, attitudes towards environmental sustainability, perceived knowledges or the

cognitive aspects, intention towards environmental sustainability practices, and existing practices followed by managers and employees in restaurants.

The empirical findings here indicate that employees' discernment of the environmental concern and their effects on the environment vitally triggered their individual moral norm. This phenomenon, subsequently, had an influential effect on their attitudes, specifically towards voluntary pro-environmental behaviour. In regards to 'awareness of consequences', the view from the respondent on waste management indicated that social coercion from environmental sustainability concerns triggered individual moral norms that resultantly regulated the individual attitude towards voluntary pro-environmental behaviour. One of the most crucial revelations was that, work atmosphere in the fast-food restaurants can seldom become metaphorically supersonic, making it practically far-fetched for the employees to abide by the task-environment compliance mechanism - hence, personal moral norms take precedence here for the individuals to sustain environmentally-friendly behaviour.

Later on, the second part describes *Managerial Discretion on Employees' Pro-environmental Behavior* which entails environmentally-specific transformational leadership, sharing own values to influence, inspire high achievement, foster creative thinking, and promote green leadership. This leadership style focused on promoting and implementing sustainable practices within an organization. It involves guiding and inspiring employees to adopt eco-friendly behaviors and integrating environmental considerations into business decisions and operations (Clegg et al., 2006).

As this study extends Lulfs and Hahn's (2013) model through the merger of managerial discretion dynamics, the empirical findings suggest a direct influence of those dynamics on the motivational determinants. In this respect, the motivational determinant of 'perceived behavioural control' - more specifically, employees' 'perceived supervisory support' - draws the optimum attention. The transfer of know-how is an aspect that leverages in the form of such supervisory support. For instance, when an interviewee asserted managerial efforts to educate the employees with knowledge gained from the company conventions, it shed light on both indirect and direct influence on employees' engagement in pro-environmental behaviour. The front-line managers verbally convey such messages during the meetings, where these communications revolve around information sourced from regional conferences that uphold the organisation's systematic efforts towards environmental practices.

Ajzen (1991) distinguished between dimensions of perceived behavioural control that are internal and external. Individual dispositional components, such as the quality of knowledge employees possess and their aptitudes, are examples of internal control factors. External behavioural control elements are those that come from outside the person and either assist or impede in performing the behaviour. Up until recently, research (Flannery and May, 2000) has concentrated on internal control elements like self-efficacy (the knowledge, competence and decision-making abilities needed). Evidence found by Flannery and May (2000) portray that employees who aspire to act in a pro-environmental manner, organisation's environmentally-inclined impression reinforces their external perceived behavioural control. Therefore, evidently, in the form of knowledge transfer, employee intentions to act in a pro-environmental manner face considerable influence from corporate environmental performance.

As per the views exerted by the respondents under the Foster Creative Thinking section, the 'rewards and reinforcement' dynamic of managerial discretion came into effect. Rewards seemed to come in the form of recognition - a non-monetary incentive deployed to the minimum-wage employees in the fast-food restaurants. The effect of this dynamic is two-fold: first, rewards and reinforcement provide substance to the latitude of actions for the managers themselves; second, it regulates the managerial attention to be directed towards the operative-level employees who are the most valuable stakeholders and yet underrepresented. This is a classic example of the notion that middle managers have their hands on the 'pulse of the organisation' and are closer to the employees (Dutton et al., 1997). This proximity indicated that the managers in this study could actively engage in mobilising the resources. Importantly, we are mindful here to draw back to managerial attention and label it as a resource that is mobilised by the middle managers in the form of recognition, appreciation and acknowledgement to the operative-level employees. In this regard and tracing back to our proposed extension to the model, the motivational determinant of the employees gathers ample justification as their perception of supervisory support is enhanced. This is hence a leverage in pursuing intentions to initiate pro-environmental actions that eventually translate into pro-environmental behaviour.

Finally, the third part describes the *Constraints* while implementing or planning environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, the following subsections will elaborate perceived results of the research.

5.1. Personal and organizational factors in pro-environmental behavior

This subsection highlights the findings of both personal convictions and organizational frameworks related to pro-environmental behaviors among managers and employees. Organizations and employees play significant role by providing the necessary support and autonomy, fostering a culture that values sustainability, and actively involving in environmental decision-making. On the personal side, employees and managers moral norms, perceived control over their actions, and attitudes towards environmental responsibility critically influence their willingness and ability to engage in sustainable practices.

5.1.1. Personal factors

The results of this empirical study is primarily organized in alignment with the revamped model (*Appendix - 3*) developed by Lulfs and Hahn (2013) which serves as an extension of the *Theory of Planned Behavior*. The figure demonstrates how contextual elements of the organization guide the perception of behavioral control. The employees' attitudes towards pro-environmental behaviour is impacted by their individual moral norms and awareness of the cost and benefits associated with pro-environmental behaviour. Besides, a range of researchers refer to the Norm-activation-model with the presumption that moral motives dominantly drive environmentally-oriented behaviour (for instance, Bamberg et al., 2007; Manstead, 2000; Groot and Steg, 2009). Insights are being drawn from the model to particularly integrate normative determinants with the proposed version of planned behaviour theory that incorporates managerial discretion. Although argued by some researchers that the models primarily focus on motivations of individuals that influence pro-environmental behaviour, nonetheless, pro-environmental behaviour in an organisational setting could be affected by available provisions and infrastructure (referring to the work of Rajj, 2002; Steg and Vleg, 2009; Thogersen, 2005; that suggest that different provisions intensely influence private pro-environmental behaviour by citizens). It is these provisions and infrastructure where managerial discretion has the potential to tap into and reinforce the process of the planned behaviour - this study suggests. To certify this justification, Lulfs and Han's (2013) classical notion could play a vital role - which suggests - contextual facilitators or constraints ought to be regarded as relevant determinants of pro-environmental behaviour and hence required to be integrated with psychological models.

Furthermore, employees' personal moral norms are activated by social norms, and their awareness of needs and consequences. As a result, employees' pro-environmental behaviour is influenced by the perceived behavioural control and attitudes. The findings of this study illustrate that the role played by managerial discretion is indeed a critical success factor regulating the Perceived Behavioural Control stage. As employees' intention to behave pro-environmentally is reinforced (or at least regulated) by the Perceived Supervisory Support, the discretionary performance of the respective managers act as a scaffolding in shaping the outlooks of the employees while incorporating intentions to perform pro-environmentally. Habit, on the other hand, acts as a Moderating Influence. Prior to scrutinizing these processes, in order to address the purpose of this study, limelight must be shed on the principal pro-environmental behaviours employees indulge in. In case of **pro-environmental behaviours, in the fast-food restaurants**, the employees and the managers indulge in revolve around mitigating food waste, limiting non-edible waste generation, and efficient consumption of energy and CO2 emission reduction. Those are elaborated below:

5.1.1.1. Mitigating food waste

The outlets deployed a series of actions in order to mitigate food waste where managerial discretion played the role of an evident catalyst. In this genre, the following derived substantial value: (a) predictive sales management to keep food surplus to a minimum; (b) appropriate storage alongside FIFO of food items to prevent them from becoming inedible prematurely; (c) encouraging and monitoring that the food waste is disposed of in the designated littering as required by the Kommun; (d) providing the customers with the option to takeaway food leftovers if intended; (e) delegating volunteers and trainees to clean up food waste from the surrounding adjacent to the restaurant; (f) donating edible prepared food to individuals in need; (g) donating food products with little shelf-life or shorter expiry dates to the University and associations that run sustainability campaigns (for instance, Solidarity Fridge by University of Gothenburg; non-profit organisations like Food2Change and Allwin; food banks); (h) disposing of organic waste, used cooking oil and coffee grounds to organisations that operate within the recycling and refinery industry;

For instance, a member of staff employed in the back house of the restaurant explained a phenomenon as follows:

“Back here in the kitchen, our shift managers strictly prohibit us from draining used cooking oil down the sink or even drainage systems....we have been trained about the fact in our awareness meetings how such actions can ...cause clogging and blockage in the pipelines and lead to serious environmental hazards and degradation....so there is....basically no room for compromise at any cost....and non-compliance, absolutely not...”

[Employee; Restaurant B]

Member of the another restaurant also stated that:

“Actually, I was not too familiar with all the environmental terms, but yes, after getting involved in our company, I am becoming familiar gradually. I can feel that my manager is super concerned about it. One important thing to mention is about the oil we use in the kitchen, since it's a fast food restaurant. Previously, we used a type of oil that wasn't good for the environment. The company has made a change then, not using palm oil, and started converting our used frying oil into biofuel. Everyday, shift leaders and manager check twice.” *[Employee; Restaurant A]*

There are occasions when predictive ordering lacks precision and fruits and vegetables end up as surplus in the inventory of the restaurant. One of the managers upheld how their simple, yet, constructive direction comes into play:

“It's often difficult to accurately manage the inventory because, you know, sales and customer demands fluctuate...and there are many deciding factors behind this...so, if we have edible surplus in the inventory, let's say vegetables and items as such, I encourage the staff to feel free to innovate recipes for staff meal...well, only if they have the time and interest...or even take items home with them alternatively....and make use of it before they are rotten...” *[Manager; Restaurant B]*

Referring to the correct disposal of food waste, one shift leader enlightened with the fact that:

“The municipality requires us to throw (discard) food related wastage in the specific littering solutions...and you know, these are provided by them and they take care of them free of cost...but during the rush hours, the restaurant could be very busy....chaos in fact...so it relies on us how we can, kind of, technically persuade the staff in putting their best efforts to sort the food waste...see, it’s more important for us to develop this culture among the members and...of course, sense of awareness, you know could be by-product of this...”[Shift leader; Restaurant B]

Further in this context, a manger delineated crucial information which opened up avenues of interest relevant to this study. She stressed on the following:

“We receive newsletters regularly that update us on industry standards...well, maybe ‘trend’ is a more common word these days...our management wants the managers to make informed decisions...so we were sent information about the National Action Plan, the famous Gothenburg Model...you can look it up if you already haven’t...very interesting...”[Manager; Restaurant A]

The Swedish Food Agency collaborated with the *Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)*, research institutes, county councils, trade organizations and catering services to develop a national method to measure for food waste. The application of this method encompasses small and large-scale Kitchens from preparation to serving. The foundation of this is provided by the Gothenburg Model and has been published in the form of a handbook named “Handbook for Reducing Food Waste” (Swedish Food Agency, 2020). The unit managers from 30 preschool kitchens shared the waste measurement periodically in joint meetings, causing a reduction in food

waste by 70 percent, from approximately 1000 kg to nearly 300 kg per month. Hence, this model has been amplified as a national-level model (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2021).

5.1.1.2. Limiting non-edible waste generation

In order to mitigate the waste generated from non-edible sources, the restaurants actively seek to employ a range of practices. The majority of these practices are not obligatory, but contingent on managerial initiation, directions, and monitoring the execution process. It must be mentioned that the practical deployment of such practices varies amongst restaurants. The findings highlight that managers encourage the servers in the front house to actively limit the numbers of carrier bags, napkins, salt and pepper seasoning and sugar sachets. One of the managers shed spotlight on a number of taken-for-granted practices that the staff members often very reluctantly engage in, and how these are discouraged. We found almost the same statements from both restaurant A and B. One of the managers mentioned the following:

“As a manager, I personally encourage the staff to limit their consumption of serving napkins, disposable cups and meal boxes during their shifts...please do not take ten napkins if you are only drying your hands...it may sound strange but some of the staff are often so reluctant about these actions that they seem to do it from some unaware state of mind...like as if it’s a muscle memory thing...we even got ceramic plates and stainless steel cutleries for inhouse usage...but I believe it is our responsibility to build awareness among them and tell them that such unnecessary consumption will just end up in landfills...the same goes for customer service...if it’s just one burger someone is buying, please don’t just spontaneously give away unnecessary packaging materials...”[Manager; Restaurant B]

Another manager of the other restaurant discourage his group members from *using tissue papers unless* it really needs to. Specially while they are beside or in front of the frier station, he always suggested them to use reusable towels or febrics which the company has already provided for all kitchen members. While using tissue paper, he feels like he is cutting down of trees which hit his

moral commitment. Rivetingly enough, the interplay between the managers and the operative-level employees indicates the reciprocation within an organizational setting. Given the fact that managers themselves are employees to the organization, the aggregate impact of such persuasion techniques beyond formal corporate mechanisms and instructions is - to a large extent (if not entirely) - dependent on the altitude to which managerial actions strive for the realization of pro-environmental behavior among the subordinates. A truly crucial revelation here suggests that this magnitude of managerial performance has the potential to even affect the strategic intentions of upper management.

5.1.1.3. Efficient consumption of energy and CO2 emission reduction

Energy consumption was one of the major aspects highlighted by the interviewees, and rightfully so. From a technical environmental practice perspective, managers appeared to be innovative enough and applied discretion at varying spheres, though certain practices were branch-specific. One of the staff members described as follows:

“Our managers advise us to use the exertion fans moderately...of course not during hot summer days, then it will be to tolerate the heat in the kitchen...we should not consume energy recklessly, specially in such times of inflation...they (managers) even persuaded the big bosses to install occupancy sensors so that the lighting is not there unnecessarily 24/7...and I guess most of the lights are energy-efficient ones...I do not think it is like this everywhere....”[Employees; Restaurant A, Restaurant B]

Managers educated the employees in identifying the task-related equipment and technologies that accelerate energy consumption. However, in rare occasions, managers were criticised for not leading by actions, but using a deterrence mechanism to practise authoritative management of the employees. An employee explained:

“It is so frustrating to see that he (manager) does not follow the rules that he himself set before...but we must follow...otherwise it is always about cutting our hours...as if that is the only way to reduce expenditure...you can not just run the dishwasher with one or two items inside...why turning the washing machine with a few aprons inside, isn't common sense?”[Employee; Restaurant A]

Apart from such constructive criticism, in majority of the cases, managers were praised for their unorthodox ideas and out-of-the-box of thought. One of the members of staff contrasted the choices of her current manager with the previous ones in the following manner:

“Now in our store we use water efficient laundry equipment and dishwashers and credit goes to the shift manager...she is very intelligent and puts effort into making the right choice when ordering for inventory...we even have eco-friendly detergents, can you believe...”[Employee; Restaurant B]

In contrast, the efforts to reduce carbon footprint and emissions were heavily dependent on the strategic decision-makers near the peak of the hierarchical spheres. This left the minimal room for the restaurant managers to strive for innovation in this genre. For instance, shift managers had no voice when it came to supply chain affairs or sourcing of locally produced items and ingredients as opposed to importing them. This discovery called for an academic scrutiny, hence the following notion was of relevance. Taking ‘impact’ as a scale into account, environmentally-oriented behaviour could be categorised into low, medium and high-impact, based on the degree of carbon-reduction that it could achieve. Captivatingly, a range of behaviour exists that do not necessarily deliver high-impact from an emission-reduction perspective, but, they relate to psychological intentions that potentially cater for lifestyle changes (Dumitru, 2015). This refers back to a piece of empirical data where a staff explained:

“I prefer my electric scooter in case I miss the public transport and getting late to work...my managers went for company conventions ...then they told us in the meetings how our company is trying to reduce its carbon emissions...personally, it

is inspiring to me...I feel good that I can do whatever I can within my capacity and make better choices...”[Employee; Restaurant B]

5.1.2. Organizational factors

During the conversation with participants, we came to know that organizational factors, reflecting to organizational support theory, played a significant role in shaping pro-environmental behavior within the workplace. These factors can influence how employees think about and engage in activities that reduce environmental impact. The values, norms, policy and practices that pervade an organization significantly affect employees' environmental behaviors. A culture that prioritizes sustainability, supported by management and embedded in the organization's operations, can encourage employees to adopt similar values. It has been confirmed by the statement of one of the managers –

Our company has always been a family business since it first opened its doors. The founder was a Swedish and a true visionary and had a deep passion for sustainability. He was committed to both environmental and social issues which laid the groundwork for our company's sustainability efforts today. He carried forward this tendency to the next generation and they've continued and subsequently focused on four key areas: Environment, Health, Fairness, and Engagement. [Manager; Restaurant A]

Supportive organizational practices increase employee engagement by making employees feel valued and part of the organization. It includes arrangement of training, reciprocal rewards etc. Both restaurants arrange training programs frequently which is termed as “employee education program”. These practices are embedded in the company policy to educate its employees on a regular basis so that they can have a clear understanding about the importance of environmental sustainability. Subsequently, they engage themselves in applying those learnings into daily activities. These initiatives of the restaurants indicate practicing and maintaining pro-environmental behavior based on a task-based approach.

5.2. Managerial discretion on employees' pro-environmental behavior

Leaders play a critical role in setting priorities and serve as role models for their employees. When leaders demonstrate a commitment to environmental issues, it can motivate employees to follow suit. Leadership with discretion, in particular, has been found effective in fostering pro-environmental behaviors by inspiring and intellectually stimulating employees to think about their environmental impacts (Robertson et al., 2013).

5.2.1. Sharing own values to influence

Sharing own values to influence team members for common good display idealized influence (Robertson et al., 2013). We found a glimpse of the above reality through one of the respondent's statement, who has been working as a manager of the restaurant, the statement was as follows:

We've implemented several practices such as reducing waste by recycling, using energy-efficient appliances, and sourcing food from local suppliers to minimize our carbon footprint. Usually, we try to maintain sustainable practices collaboratively but I personally emphasize on water consumption during dish washing and during preparing the ingredients for burgers, and also reducing waste, anti-littering initiatives, and energy savings, etc. to be a role model and encourage my employees to follow sustainable practices both at work and in their personal lives.

We found another respondent who is purely Swedish and deeply rooted in the sustainable practices. One of his friends are working in Greenpeace (an environmental organization), and he was highly inspired to be environmentally sustainable. In this connection, he developed his norms and values which fully supported pro-environmental behavior. He mentioned something extremely interesting in his long quote:

"I am highly fascinated by developing such practices which will save our world. It could be started from a simple step which may spread throughout

the society and later throughout the world. I personally developed sustainable practices from the ethical and spiritual point of view. I find inner peace when I think and do something good for the environment. This world is gift for me, and we all should have to be very careful about it by sacrificing the present and temporary happiness. For instance, inspired by my friend, who is connected with Greenpeace, I do not prefer air travel until I really need to. I know what is the impact of airplanes in our environment. I myself have electric car and my daughter has also electric car. Also I personally prefer reusable commodities and my wife also use reusable sanitary napkin. My colleagues always appreciate my preference and habits and they also try to follow in their personal life and in our restaurant.”

5.2.2. Inspire high achievement

This highlight how leaders use their passion and commitment to inspire their teams, focusing on sustainable practices and environmental stewardship, which aligns with the concept of inspirational motivation. Respondents views from the Swedish fast-food restaurant are stated as follows:

Respondent 1:

“Our supervisor tells stories of environmental pioneers and integrates these narratives into our company goals. This approach doesn’t just motivate us; it connects our daily efforts to those of global change-makers. I am lucky that I had chosen Sweden for my study, I have found something here that I foster in my mind since my childhood” [Employee; Restaurant A]

Front-line managers constantly reminds his or her subordinates of the bigger picture, that their work isn't just about meeting targets but also about making a positive impact on the environment. It reminds that company policy is not for the company but also for the society as well. Managers’ enthusiasm for sustainability inspires their employees to think beyond our daily tasks. Communicating company policies to employees at the operational level is crucial. The effectiveness of this communication varies from manager to manager, largely depending on the manager's level of passion and cognitive engagement. Passionate and cognitively engaged

managers are more likely to convey policies effectively and inspire employees to follow them. For this reason, we found that employees of all restaurants are not equally aware about their existing policy.

5.2.3. Foster creative thinking

During our prolonged conversation with a few respondents, we came to know that how managers or our colleagues who are specifically working with sustainability encourage our innovative thinking towards environmental sustainability. It implies demonstrating how leaders promoting intellectual stimulation influence their teams to engage critically and creatively with environmental challenges, encouraging innovative thinking and solutions that go beyond traditional practices. Moreover, both restaurants have introduced various initiatives like waste segregation, recycling programs, and the use of sustainable packaging. Employees are encouraged to participate actively in these initiatives. For example, some stores have implemented programs where employees can earn points or rewards for suggesting and successfully implementing new sustainability practices. We have found something interesting in respondents' quote:

Respondent 1:

“Our responsible colleagues have fostered a culture where everyone’s ideas are valued, especially when it comes to sustainability. This approach has led us to rethink our waste management processes and find innovative ways to reduce our environmental footprint. For instance, our company’s collaboration with other organization to work together to engage littering management is a great example of creative thinking generated from our employees.”[Employee; Restaurant B]

Respondent 2:

He often asks during meeting that, “Are we following company policies related to sustainability? I would highly appreciate it if you give us some idea of our several core processes, from energy consumption to ingredient

procurement, making them more eco-friendly." In this way, one of our major contributions is to think about alternative solutions for beef items, and launching chicken item, because it has been said that cattle is responsible for generating methane gas which has a negative impact in the environment. [Employee; Restaurant A]

5.2.4. Promote green leadership

Respondents highlight how leaders practicing Individualized Consideration can effectively engage their teams in environmental sustainability by focusing on personal development, demonstrating empathy, and aligning individual employee goals with broader environmental objectives. Employees are often recognized and rewarded for their efforts in promoting sustainability. For instance, those who consistently demonstrate eco-friendly behaviors might receive performance-based bonuses or other forms of recognition. This not only motivates individual employees but also fosters a culture of sustainability within the team. To further engage employees, front-line managers organize events and activities focused on environmental awareness. These might include clean-up drives, tree planting events, or workshops on sustainable living. Participation in such activities is often incentivized through recognition or small rewards.

Quotes from several respondents are mentioned:

Respondent 1:

She recognizes our strengths and challenges when it comes to sustainability efforts. By providing specific training and resources, she helps us develop the skills needed to innovate and implement eco-friendly solutions effectively. She herself also talk with customers to talk about vegan items and a specified chicken menu to push customers toward sustainable items instead of beef which has negative impact in our environment. These practices ignite our inner fascination toward emphasizing on pro-environmental now and in the upcoming days. [Employee; Restaurant B]

Respondent 2:

I was initially skeptical about how much difference I could make, but through continuous encouragement and personalized support from our manager, I've become an active participant in our workplace's sustainability initiatives. She makes sure that we all understand how our individual actions contribute to larger environmental goals. [Employee; Restaurant A]

5.3. Constraints

On a personal level, one of the largest obstacles is the lack of awareness or level of understanding of sustainability and its impacts. Many individuals may not recognize the severity of environmental issues or understand how their behaviors contribute to problems like climate change. This lack of awareness can lead to apathy or skepticism towards environmental initiatives. Additionally, habits and cultural norms often resist change, making it difficult to adopt more sustainable behaviors (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Moreover, at both personal and community levels, economic factors play a significant role. The initial cost of adopting green technologies or practices can be prohibitively high. For individuals, the premium prices of eco-friendly products deter widespread adoption. For communities and businesses, substantial investments are needed to transition to sustainable infrastructures, such as introducing vegan items, renewable energy systems or efficient waste management technologies, which can be a significant financial burden (Markard, Raven, & Truffer, 2012).

Based on the discussion with the respondents, we came to know that there are two fundamental issues for which the implication of environmental practices are impeded. The first one is economic instability and the second one is difficulties in keeping the employees engaged consistently in such practices.

For instance, one of the respondents stated:

“Sweden has been facing economic instability which push our top management to think about cost-cutting issue. For this reason, our manager is always concern about cutting our working hour and oblige us to work with limited people. They are not thinking about environmental sustainability right now.”

The above statement is really alarming because, it is true that the Swedish economy is in recession since 2023 due to high inflation and increased interest rates (Government Offices of Sweden, 2023). Therefore, this economic instability often forces a shift in priorities at both individual and organizational levels. Like other businesses, the focus of restaurants might shift from sustainable practices to cost-cutting measures that are not always environmentally friendly. For individuals, economic hardship might lead to prioritizing cheaper, non-eco-friendly options due to reduced disposable income, influencing market demand away from sustainable products.

Respondents also mentioned about the second problem or barriers:

“Sometimes it is not possible to act or behave green during rush time. For instance, Green Marketing Initiatives” in engaging customers become very tough during the very rush time which is a common feature of our restaurant. Also, I cannot engage my employees to act green behavior during heavy rush time. Also due to stress at work, some employees’ lack of interest on consistently following the environmental sustainable hinder implementation of sustainable practices”

The fact is, individuals' consistent engagement in sustainable practices can be a challenge for the managers because, this behavior is generated from individual norms, beliefs, and knowledge which are not equal for all employees. Therefore, all employees will not response equally to the policies, practices, and manager’s discretionary support related to the environmental sustainability. Moreover, during the conversation with managers, we were also informed that the employees’ turnover rate among employees is relatively high in this sector. The reason is, sometimes managers are obliged to recruit employees who are below 18 years old to minimize the cost, which ultimately affect in long run. Those newly recruited employees don’t last for long time, that is why we have to arrange the same training again and again, and limit ourselves to think about advanced training modules related to sustainability.

6. Discussion and analysis:

This thesis explores the pivotal role of managerial discretion in fostering pro-environmental behaviors among employees in fast-food restaurants in Sweden and identifies the constraints to implementing these behaviors. The study has the optimum enthusiasm to comprehend the implications of managerial discretion when it comes to the pro-environmental behaviour of employees in an organisational setting. The findings highlight the significant influence of managers' environmental commitment and their ability to motivate and guide their teams towards sustainable practices. The study underscores that managerial discretion not only involves the implementation of environmental strategies but also shapes the cultural and operational norms within a restaurant, promoting a workplace that values sustainability. Hence, the dynamics of managerial discretion were integrated in the blueprint of the model developed by Lulfs and Hahn (2013). From an empirical standpoint, the organisational context under distal predictors of the model are seldom criticised to serve mere compliance purposes to satisfy sustainability reporting standards. Moreover, the research illustrates that personal factors such as moral norms and perceived behavioral control significantly affect employees' pro-environmental behaviors.

In reference to the meta-analysis conducted by Bamberg et al. (2007) and environmental psychology's pragmatic findings, pro-environmental behaviour in the private sphere is best understood as a blend of self-interest and concern for other creatures, or the ecosystem in its entirety. It is revealed by previous research that pro-environmental behaviour could be looked through the lenses of moral norms in order to enhance the comprehension. However, although in a systematic manner, the literature includes personal moral obligations only at irregular intervals - meaning that the inclusion is not prominent. Lulfs and Hahn (2013) oppose this omission in the attempt to explain voluntary pro-environmental behaviour. This study is in agreement with this opposition and the merger of the managerial dynamics with the model unfolds a set of critical assumptions; the following are the explanations of the associated train of thoughts.

Employees are more likely to engage in environmentally sustainable practices when they perceive strong support from their managers and when they believe their actions can make a difference. This is further enhanced by organizational factors such as policy support and training programs which equip employees with the knowledge and skills needed to act in environmentally responsible ways. However, these formal requirements do add value to the perceived image and impression of the restaurants both to the external stakeholders and the employees. Nonetheless,

this study postulates that these distal predictors require intense supplementary forces in order to construct an organisational culture that promotes pro-environmental behaviour, hence, discretion of the managers come into play. As suggested, the managerial discretion could potentially directly influence the motivational determinants, specifically the perceived supervisory support.

A range of researchers (for instance, Klockner and Blobaum, 2010; Thøgersen, 2006) argue that the inclusion of personal norms into models that elucidate individual pro-environmental behaviour minimises the direct influence of social norms. Nevertheless, this does not imply that the social norms are of any less importance; rather, it means that these are embodied or absorbed into the framework of personal norms. The empirical findings of this study illustrate the following: in the construction of these social norms in an organisational setting, more specifically, in a fast-paced restaurant atmosphere, the personal norms possessed by the middle managers have indicated substantial fluidity. An important note here is that personal attributes of the middle managers

Apart from that, the purpose of our research was also involved discretionary implications in two different types of restaurants in terms of operational settings and governance. The Swedish company “A” in our research is deeply rooted in environmental issues as it was initiated by the founder which was later carried forward to their heirs and gradually this tendency is transformed in a new shape favouring environmental sustainability. Therefore, the organizational dynamics are reflected through culture and policies which are communicated mostly in top-down approach. Subsequently, those are diffused and further communicated by the managers or leaders among other employees where discretionary impact is irreplaceable at the operational level. On the other hand, company “B” is a franchisee who practices and maintain pro-environmental behavior as a form of both task related and voluntary. In this perspectives, franchisor impose policies and practices which are task based or obligatory. Nevertheless, franchisees autonomy also play role side by side in implementing pro-environmental behavior on voluntary basis. This tendency comes from individual norms, moral commitments, and altruistic point of view. However, the transfer of franchisor’s know-how and its strategic position due to being multination further influence individuals’ pro-environmental behavior directly or indirectly where manager’s subjective approach are also considerable (Dada et al., 2023). However, from the strategic stance, managers usually engage to co-create practices with other entities to establish social justice logic and market-oriented logic together (Nicholls et al., 2016).

As the analysis of this study progressed, it was established that a number of organisational dynamics influenced the environmental behaviour among the employees. Managerial transfer of knowledge regarding the environmental practices alongside managerial autonomy and degree of decision-making process, affected the pro-environmental behaviour undertaken by the subordinates that this study concentrates on.

Lulfs and Hahn (2013) articulately installed theory of planned behavior and norm activation model into their model of VPBE - undoubtedly an unprecedented extension - that utilises the principles of environmental psychology to justify the role of personal norms in explaining pro-environmental behaviour that eventually is carried forward to the workplace. Indeed, this is the first instance of deployment of norm activation model in the corporate context, they argued. It is further believed that the lack of norm activation model's utilisation is due to the notion that contextual or organisational influences are the dominant in shaping behaviour in the corporate realm. Nevertheless, in green management literature, individual norms, values and concern are recognised as the drivers of sustainable behaviour (Onel, 2023; Liu and Yang, 2022). Despite this, the majority of the environmental management literary work falls short of identifying these values and norms, nor a clear distinction between them is made. The inclusion of norm activation model in the VPBE model does more than merely validating the integration of norms, it indeed simultaneously paves the way for managerial discretion to deploy its role as a moderator in the entire chain. It is held that personal norms are not inevitably on an active status consistently, rather they require triggering during a forgoing process of norm-activation. As presented earlier, 'awareness' is an elemental aspect in the activation of any norm in question; the literature addressing pro-environmental corporate behavior also highlights these facts of 'awareness'. For instance, demonstration by Tudor, Barr and Gilg (2008) disseminates that behaviour towards sustainable waste management is indirectly predicted by one's level of awareness. The notions derived from Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst (2013) who emphasized the role of 'awareness' in conjunction with Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987). It dictates that in order for an option to be a part of the discretionary set, the manager must be aware of the option itself. This means it is contingent on the individual manager's awareness for an option to be recognised and subsequently becoming an element of the discretionary set. From norm activation model perspective, the awareness of need and awareness of consequences are critical success factors in the activation of personal norms. Nonetheless, in order to capitalize on these awareness in an organizational setting,

awareness of the administrative and operational options available to the middle managers ought to play the crucially complementary role. In fact, from a literal standpoint, the definitions of 'awareness' emphasise the term as to be the manager's internal state that is focused on an issue and linked to accessible knowledge and information (Penguin Dictionary of Psychology; Reber and Reber, 2001). Furthermore, Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst (2013) point out that conscious perception or consciousness is emphasised by awareness. Overall, as a concept, awareness delivers two enlightening connotations; one - unconscious occurrence or existence of anything is prevented by consciousness; two - as manager's awareness is always shifting based on the stimuli that impact the mind, the notion of awareness is intrinsically dynamic and offers a suitable foundation for the construction of a dynamic view of theory on managerial discretion (Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst, 2013).

Tracing back to the literary construct on managerial discretion within the organization, Wangrow et al. (2015) review indicated managerial discretion's role at the organizational level in relation to outcomes like commitment to a specific course of actions, firm performance variability or even the compensation of the CEOs. The level of discretion perceived by the middle managers within an organisational spectrum, however, is scarce in research, due to dominant focus shifting towards Top Management Team (Wangrow et al., 2015). The findings of this study articulate the importance of the role of organizational members outside of the theory of planned behavior, in regulating internal outcomes. Relevance to this is the expression highlighted by research on strategy implementation and change management - which postulates that - the appropriate implementation of strategy hinges on managers at the operations level. This study encounters this contingency from an empirical perspective where managerial discretion acts as both conduits and catalyst in order to regulate execution at the very granular level - the level where the most underrated, undermined, and overlooked employees are found - the operative level. It is imperative that discretion of the managers in question is unleashed if the most effective implementation of strategic vision is to be achieved. Hence, the antecedents to the entrepreneurial behavior of the middle-managers, proposed by Kuratko et al. (2005), are adapted and injected as the discretionary dynamics of managerial discretion in the model of pro-environmental behavior that this study proposes.

Nevertheless, several constraints hinder the effective implementation of these practices. Economic instability, competitive market, and operational pressures, particularly during peak

business hours, often prioritize immediate business needs over environmental considerations. Gradually organizational logic becomes vital ignoring institutional logic related to pro-environmental behavior. Additionally, the transient nature of employment in the fast-food industry complicates the sustained engagement of employees in environmental initiatives.

7. Conclusion

This study confirms that managerial discretion plays a crucial role in shaping pro-environmental behaviors within fast-food restaurants. Managers who demonstrate a strong commitment to environmental values effectively inspire their employees to adopt similar behaviors. However, the study also reveals that the implementation of such behaviors faces significant challenges, primarily economic pressures and the structural dynamics of the fast-food industry. To overcome these obstacles, the thesis recommends that fast-food restaurants integrate environmental sustainability more deeply into their operational strategies and provide ongoing support and training to employees. It also suggests that further research could explore the long-term impacts of these managerial practices on environmental sustainability within the fast-food industry in different organizational dynamics. This could involve a broader examination of policy and economic factors that influence the efficacy of pro-environmental behaviors in the workplace.

The learning curve from this study complements the fact that managerial discretion may best be comprehended as a continuum, as opposed to mere discreet activities of managers as individuals. Hence, measuring the degree of discretion is a complex and multi-dimensional aspiration and falls out of the scope of this study. Rather this study concentrated on the administrative and operations related practices and initiative of the front-line managers that fell in the stated continuum. The potential options or actions were introduced by Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987) as the fundamental building block in their original conceptualisation of managerial discretion. In a successive attempt to facilitate elaboration, they contended that managerial discretion dwells in part within the manager rather than solely being determined by the contextual forces. This notion further sophisticates itself with the inclusion of managers' awareness of the course of actions which fall within the zone of acceptance (approval of the powerful stakeholders) of the powerful parties involved. This led Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst (2013) to propose that managerial discretion could be expressed as a function of managerial

awareness and zone of acceptance. Although managerial awareness did receive appreciation in the discussion part of this study, it is the zone of acceptance that limits the front-line managers' initiatives - paralyses their awareness - in the fast-food restaurant settings. This only adds to the complications for them to persuade the operative-level employees to behave pro-environmentally. The implication of this train of thought is that the manager becomes somewhat the neglected part in both the theoretical framework of managerial discretion and the professional settings of organisations.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Consent form

Course: Master Thesis in Strategic HRM Labour relation

Course Code: PV2500

About Us:

We are the students, **Md Asike Mehboob** and **Soumyadeep Paul Chowdhury**, at the **University of Gothenburg** studying in the Master's programme in *Strategic Human Resource Management & Labour Relations* under the Department of Sociology and Work Science. Now we are in the last semester and we have a course which is about “**Master Thesis in Strategic HRM & Labour relation (PV2500)**”. This course is mainly on thesis preparation either in qualitative method or quantitative method. In our research paper, we have chosen the qualitative method which requires collecting data through in-depth interview or conversations between the interviewee and interviewer. The title of our research is “*Managerial Discretion Shapes Employees’ Pro-Environmental Behavior and the Barriers Associated with Implementation*”. The learning process includes understanding a phenomenon based on the theories and analyzing participant’s experiences and insights.

Purpose:

The purpose of our research paper is to explore the influence of **managerial discretion** on the participation of employees in environmentally sustainable practices within **fast-food restaurants** in Sweden. Additionally, this study seeks to identify **potential barriers** to the adoption of these environmental practices.

The responsible teachers and supervisor:

The teachers responsible for this course, **Bertil Rolandsson** and **Ylva Wallinder**, are a *Professor and a Senior Lecturer* respectively at the *Department of Sociology and Work Science* at the **University of Gothenburg**. Our responsible supervisor is **Monica Andersson Bäck** who is also a *Senior Lecturer* at the same department and university.

Data collection:

The data collection consists of qualitative interviews with open-ended questions.

Participation:

Participation is voluntary and anonymous according to the Swedish secrecy act. All involved in the project are covered by professional secrecy. Personal names are not registered or will be exchanged for fake names when interviews are transcribed. The participant can choose to change the terms of her/his participation or to cancel the participation (e.g. an interview) without giving reasons if he/ she wishes.

Handling of collected material:

The interview will be recorded with the permission of participants and are kept locked away. Those data will only be available to researchers (**Md Asike Mehboob** and **Soumyadeep Paul Chowdhury**) for analysis. Our supervisor and examiner may require access to the collected data. All interviews and notes will be transcribed to our computer. The transcribed documents are named and sorted by number or fake name. The collected material and transcription of interviews will not be used for any purpose other than our research paper. The interview and transcription will be deleted after the course has been completed.

Results and publication:

The results of the study will not be published.

For questions and further information, please contact:

Name: Monica Andersson Bäck (Senior Lecturer)

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CONSENT FORM - Consent to participate

I have read and fully understood the scope and implications of participating in this study. I agree that the interview can be digitally recorded. I can withdraw my participation in this study. I have carefully read and agreed to participate in this interview session of the above title of the research.

I agree to participate

- I agree to my personal details being handled as described above.

Appendix 2: Interview guideline

Overview of the research: Hello, we are the students of University of Gothenburg presently working on our master thesis. Our master's program is on Strategic HRM and Labor Relations and the thesis is mainly on *the way employees are influenced by Managerial Discretion in building their/individual pro-environmental behavior*. This will facilitate employees to engage in environmental sustainability. However, in spite of having the intention of being environmentally sustainable, sometimes it becomes difficult to implement accordingly which we have also taken into consideration to investigate. This is a qualitative research and we have applied "Qualitative Interview" method. This interview session, mainly composed of open-ended questions, which will provide us with valuable insights that will contribute to the research for the thesis.

Ethical consideration: Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary, and the answers will be handled with the highest level of confidentiality. With your consent, the overall interview sessions will be recorded which will subsequently be transcribed for in-depth analysis. The overall transcription will remain anonymized as a part of the research ethic. Once the thesis is completed, the recording will be deleted. The participant has the right to modify the terms of their participation or to withdraw from the participation without providing any reasons if he/she wishes to do so.

---:Interview Questions for Managers Only:---

Beginning of the interview (Contextual information)

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your insights are valuable to understanding how managerial discretion shapes employees' pro-environmental behaviors in fast-food restaurants and the barriers to implementing pro-environmental behaviors into practices. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers, and we're interested in your honest opinions and experiences.

Demographic questions:

1. Would you please share your role and how long you've been engaged in your role? How long have you been working in the same organization?
2. Please tell me about the different roles of those working in your restaurant.

Personal attitudes towards environmental sustainability:

3. What do you know about environmental sustainability?
4. In your opinion, why is environmental sustainability important for a company?
(*Clues: employer branding or corporate reputation, business strategy for profit maximization, intention of being good for the environment*)
5. When and how are you inspired by environmental sustainability?
(*Clues: Source of inspiration*)
6. Do you personally follow the environmental sustainability practices in your personal life?
If “YES” what are those?

Personal and organizational practices:

7. Is your company Swedish or foreign-based?
8. What are the main environmental policies and practices in your company? Is it mandatory or optional to follow by all employees?
9. If the answer of the question no 8 is “yes”,
Is your company following these policies and practices due to pressure from NGO/ government/customer/ or just a tradition/culture/Owner’s passion?
10. Do you perfectly follow those policies? If yes, do you perfectly follow those policies due to obligation or moral commitment?
11. Do you personally follow some environmental friendly/sustainable practices in your restaurant which is not mentioned in the company policy? If “YES” what are those?
12. Does your company arrange any training program in relation to environmental behavior?
If yes, what type of programs?
13. Does your company have any partnerships with other NGOs to do certain environmental sustainability activities? If yes, what are those activities?

14. Can you describe the environmental sustainable practices you prefer most and encourage other employees to follow in your restaurant?

Influence and motivation:

15. Do you consider a candidate who is passionate about environmental sustainability to be perfect for the recruitment process?
16. Do you consider employees' commitment to environmental sustainability when evaluating good performance?
17. As a restaurant manager, do you discuss about environmental sustainability issues with your colleagues on regular basis or do you take any suggestion from your subordinates made policy accordingly?

Perceived constraints:

18. What do you see as the biggest obstacles to achieving environmental sustainability in your restaurant?

Progress and future perspectives:

19. Does your company have any new plan regarding environmental sustainable practices? Do you have any new plan regarding environmental sustainable practices?

Concluding question:

20. Do you have any final thoughts or anything else on the topic of environmental sustainability that you'd like to share?

Post-interview:

Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences and insights. Your contribution is invaluable to our research on environmental sustainability.

-: Interview Questions for Shift leaders/restaurant assistant/kitchen staff only:-

Beginning of the interview (Contextual information)

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your insights are valuable to understanding how managerial discretion shapes employees' pro-environmental behaviors in fast-food restaurants and the barriers to implementing pro-environmental behaviors into practices. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers, and we're interested in your honest opinions and experiences.

Demographic questions:

1. Would you please share your role and how long you've been engaged in your role? How long have you been working in the same organization?
2. Please tell me about the different roles of those working in your restaurant.

Personal attitudes towards environmental sustainability:

3. What do you know about environmental sustainability?
4. In your opinion, why is environmental sustainability important for a company?
(*Clues: employer branding or corporate reputation, business strategy for profit maximization, intention of being good for the environment*)
5. When and how are you inspired by environmental sustainability?
6. Do you personally follow the environmental sustainability practices in your personal life?
If "YES" what are those?

Personal and organizational practices:

7. Is your company Swedish or foreign-based?
8. What are the main environmental policies and practices in your company? Is it mandatory or optional to follow by all employees?
9. If the answer of the question no 8 is "yes",
Is your company following these policies and practices due to pressure from NGO/government/customer/ or just a tradition/culture/Owner's passion?
10. Do you perfectly follow those policies? If yes, do you perfectly follow those policies due to obligation or moral commitment?

11. Are you properly guided by your manager regarding to follow some environmental friendly/sustainable practices in your restaurant which is not mentioned in the company policy? If “YES” what are those?
12. Do you find something exceptional and motivating factors in your manager’s attitude which you follow in your personal life and in the restaurant?
13. Does your company arrange any training program in relation to environmental behavior? If yes, what type of programs?
14. Does your company have any partnerships with other NGOs to do certain environmental sustainability activities? If yes, what are those activities?
15. Can you describe the environmental sustainable practices you prefer most and encourage other employees to follow in your restaurant?

Influence and motivation:

16. Did your manager ask you about anything related to environmental sustainability in the time of recruitment process?
17. Does your manager discuss about environmental sustainability issues with you all on regular basis or do you have any scope to share your thoughts with your manager?
18. Do you believe that you are highly influenced by your manager?

Perceived constraints:

19. What do you think about the biggest obstacles to achieving environmental sustainability in your restaurant?

Progress and future perspectives:

20. Does your company have any new plan regarding environmental sustainable practices?
Does your manager have any new plan regarding environmental sustainable practices?

Concluding question:

21. Do you have any final thoughts or anything else on the topic of environmental sustainability that you'd like to share?

Post-interview:

Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences and insights. Your contribution is invaluable to our research on environmental sustainability.

Appendix 3: A model by Lulfs and Hahn (2013)

