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Abstract

With the societal development we are currently experiencing, coupled with the pollution it brings, sustainability has become a term used in various contexts, often losing its essence. For many, the word sustainability has become grandiose with decreasing realistic content. Sustainability is measured and reported in numbers, and discussed using terminology that requires education to comprehend the meaning. The demands for reporting grow in line with the need for sustainability, creating an increasing psychological distance to the concepts and its significance. This increasing requirement for transparency creates a widening gap between the concept of sustainability and its practical application. Consequently, sustainability is losing its essence and comprehension, becoming merely a buzzword rather than a genuine commitment to environmental and social responsibility.

This study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing 12 companies represented by an employee with sustainability responsibility. The research has been conducted through semi-structured interviews, aiming to provide comprehensive insights for the research. Subsequently, thematic analysis is applied to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data. Our analysis reveals that sustainability is distributed in various ways inside companies, and the interviewed companies are trying to motivate their employees in various initiatives. Our data addresses this through; *renewing the strategy, making it more tangible and close in time, providing substance to terminology, breaking down goals and utilizing communication*. These themes are primarily analyzed in the context of the Construal-Level Theory of Psychological Distance (CLT) by Trope and Liberman (2010), along with perspectives on other theories such as theories surrounding pro-environmental behavior and employee green initiatives, extended with attention towards communication; visions, narratives and framing. Drawing from these findings, implications and suggestions for future research are presented

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Almost all scientists who have a focus on climate change agree that humans are the reason for the environmental changes we are battling today (FN-sambandet, 2023a). An average Norwegian person is responsible for 7,6 tons of CO₂ emissions every year. We know that the temperatures are increasing, extreme weather is becoming more common, and glaciers are melting. The only way to stop climate change is to reduce emissions. This highlights that earth's resources are limited. Some people use more of earth's resources than it can handle, which will leave future generations with a lack of necessary resources (Brundtland, 1987). The earth requires sustainable development, meaning that current resource use must consider the needs of future generations.

Companies demonstrate to have adopted sustainable development goals (SDGs) into their strategies (Handelshøyskolen BI, n.d; Henriksen, 2018; Redd Barna, n.d). The goals have been developed for the world to make changes for a greener future (United Nations, n.d. a). These goals can be compared to 'ultimate aspirations' from Cartons (2018) research. SDGs, as well as vision goals, can often become vague and 'far away' because of their nature of being abstract. For example, Norway's commitment to cut CO₂ emissions by 2050 (FN-sambandet, 2023b) are ultimate aspirations that have good intentions but are vague and tend to be 'green washing' (United Nations, n.d. c). This is confirmed by the Norwegian Prime Minister's disregard for a plan to reduce the oil- and gas-industry (Rustad & Hovland, 2023), although CO₂ is the largest source of emission in the country (Miljøstatus, 2023).

Achieving sustainability goals is still a long way off (United Nations, 2023), which can generate a greater subjective experience of psychological distance to the problem (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440). The available information about sustainable behavior can cause information overload and be confusing, even though the intention was to create meaning (Briganti et al., 2023, p. 10; Feintzeig, 2015, p. 1-2). Information overload is defined as excessive activity, a high intake of stimuli and resulting in boredom (Boguslaw, 1987, p. 580). One reason for the

lack of positive impact from information sharing may be the difficulty in conveying a large quantity of information in a clear and high-quality manner (Briganti et al., 2023, p. 10). An example to optimize message conveying is illustrated by that information will be easier to find if the desk is clean (van de Kaa, 2021, p. 169). The information can also sometimes be framed in a misleading manner causing further confusion and hindering action (McMaster, 2022; Stoknes, 2014, p. 162). As noise increases in a message, boredom will escalate due to the implicit recognition that the likelihood of encountering anything interesting is remote, and meaning will disappear (Boguslaw, 1987, p. 581). This can create information that is difficult to process and may reinforce the existing psychological distance to the problem (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440).

As a result, understanding this through Construal Level Theory can create sensemaking (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). Construal theory explains that the greater the subjective psychological distance from oneself, the more abstract the idea will become (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440). Conversely, if the psychological distance is shorter, the idea will become more concrete. The concept of ‘sustainable development’ is subject to diverse interpretations, varying across cultures and among different interest groups within societies (Fien & Tilbury, 2002, p. 2). Questions such as ‘what period in time sustainability will be an issue?’ or ‘what type of development one wants to sustain?’ are different interpretations of sustainability. By applying the theory, we understand that sustainability as a goal can be challenging to understand, intangible and distant, which can result in an interpretation as abstract.

I believe it is about involving people. It is not just something the management can decide on and say; Now, we are going to focus on sustainability. (Beverage Producer 1)

As the statement highlights, the employees are crucial for a company's progress. Carton (2018) investigated how leaders can help employees see the link between their daily tasks and the ultimate aspirations of the organization, making their work feel more meaningful (p. 329). Making work meaningful means making sense of something with a positive valence, focusing on how significant it is for an individual (Rosso et al., 2010, p. 95; Steger et al, 2012, p. 4). The research noticed that without this link, the psychological distance to ultimate aspirations would likely be distanced (Carton, 2018, p. 325). Ultimate aspirations

are companies' upper and broader goals, and a difference between ultimate aspirations and subordinate organizational goals is that the first contains more abstract connotations than the latter (Carton, 2018, p. 326). Four sensegiving actions were highlighted in the study: 1. Reduction of ultimate aspirations to one; 2. The attention was moved to concrete organizational objectives from the ultimate aspiration; 3. Communication of key milestones on the pathway to the goal; 4. Connecting abstract ideas with real life events (Carton, 2018, p. 335-338). The focus of this thesis is on employees, and in light of Carton's (2018) research on making work more meaningful, the aspiration is cultivating employee green behavior within companies (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 87).

1.2 The research question

A reduction in food waste and food loss has the potential to enhance sustainable development which stands central in the 12th SDG within 2030 (Harvard, n.d.; United Nations, n.d. b). According to the Norwegian government, approximately one-third of globally produced food is discarded or wasted, and nearly 10% of all greenhouse gas emissions that are human-made is a result of food waste and food loss (Berg, n.d.). When food is thrown away, important resources are lost (Matsentralen, 2023). Producing food requires several resources, such as raw materials, water, energy and labor. It is not only the production of the food itself that exploits resources, but also the packaging of food, transportation and waste management (Matsentralen, 2023). We have chosen to investigate companies that produce food and beverage. The vast majority of people buy food and beverages, which results in a considerable amount of discarded food loss and food waste (Harvard, n.d.). This makes it relatable to all, and we perceive opportunities for improvement.

"What are organizations that produce food and beverage doing towards reducing their climate footprint?" is a broad question, but we lack the resources and the opportunity to address it through a master's thesis. This is a question that has not yet, and perhaps never will, get a definitive answer. Recognizing our limitations in resources has made us narrow down the focus and explore a smaller aspect of it. With Cartons (2018) study as inspiration and our main focus on employees, we have chosen to focus on one research question:

How can food and beverage companies bridge the psychological gap to sustainability for employees and inspire them to participate?

This highlights an interest in how leaders can make sustainability proximate, not distant. Relevant to everyday behaviors, not an “external” thing, but something that is top of mind in everyday work life. The focus is how companies make sustainability close, tangible and comprehensible for employees.

1.3 What can companies do?

Sustainability and challenges regarding implementation are important, and “top of mind” for companies (Armon, 2022; Newman, 2020). It has been written about the environment and sustainability in various media channels several times (Eilertsen, 2024.; Ertesvåg, 2023.; NRK, n.d.). The vast majority of companies spend time and resources on it (IF, n.d.; Newman, 2020). This means that sustainability is status quo, and that managers and employees put effort into ensuring that this is implemented and carried out (Armon, 2022). Leaders can adopt the ‘sensegiving’ actions by Carton (2018) to ensure comprehension and participation of employees. It is vital to have a focus on sustainability, to be able to compete with other companies, but also to keep employees and attract new ones (IF, n.d.). More consumers are also making an effort to act sustainably when shopping, utilizing platforms like "Tise" for second-hand purchases (Tise AS, 2024). This likely provides producers of consumer goods with greater incentives to meet these potential desires and demands from consumers (Andreassen & Lervik-Olsen, 2020; Newman, 2020). Consequently, companies need to adapt to sustainability measures and provide consumers and employees with what is desired by the market.

1.4 A preview of the present study

The present study has been conducted by collecting data through 12 interviewed cases. The participants have been individuals responsible for sustainability in companies producing food and beverage. The goal has been to gather information and investigate what these various companies are doing to become more sustainable, with a closer look at how managers create employee engagement and motivation towards sustainability initiatives internally in each company. The expected contributions from the data collected includes gaining insight into sustainability efforts across several companies in the same industry. The study aims to analyze how the companies are working towards reducing the subjective experience of psychological distance to sustainability and how they engage and motivate their employees to contribute for a greener future.

2.0 Theoretical background

2.1 The Construal-Level Theory of Psychological Distance

2.1.1 Previous studies using Construal-Level Theory of Psychological Distance

A research study illustrated that increased concern about climate change correlated with a decreased psychological distance (Spence et al., 2012, p. 967). Another study indicated that people are more likely to engage pro-environmentally and execute climate-resilient actions when one perceives climate change as an proximal and tangible issue within the construct of psychological distance (Maiella et al., 2020, p. 1). Psychological proximity to climate change predicted greater participation in pro-environmental actions, while individuals who felt increased psychological distance were less inclined to make personal sacrifices, such as allocating their time and money (Wang et al. 2019, p. 9-10). Sustainable behaviors, such as for example recycling, were perceived as proximal, meaning individuals had to experience them as tangible and immediate in terms of time, space, social context and hypothetical scenarios to perform the actions (Schill & Shaw, 2016, p. 357).

Tourists who shared their travel goals through social media, compared to those who did not, showed greater commitment and goal-directed behaviors when the trip was happening sooner rather than later (Su et al., 2022, p. 952). The difference between sharing goals or nondisclosure was not significant in longer temporal distances. Another study highlights the possibility that participants in the study perceived the close future as more significant and pertinent, which led them to be more involved in constructing near future events compared to distant future events (Lieberman et al., 2002, p. 530). Soderberg et al. (2015) study provided evidence that psychological distance impacts construal levels by modifying both low- and high- level features (p. 541). The study suggests psychological distance effects having wide generalizability (Soderberg et al., 2015, p. 543). Sparkman and Macdonald (2021) found that policies saving lives across the entire nation were slightly more popular than those benefiting only one's region (p. 6). The study suggested that issues affecting the nation might be at an optimal distance to evoke concern, while local issues might feel too immediate and international ones

too remote. This study emphasizes that there may be a fine line between too close and too far.

Another study found that consistently interpreting information in a more abstract manner compared to a concrete approach, predicted a greater likelihood of choosing and intending to purchase eco-friendly products (Reczek et al., 2018, p. 97). These varied reactions to eco-friendly products based on construal level seemed to stem from the alignment of abstract interpretation with a forward-looking perspective. The findings suggest that emphasizing the long-term advantages of buying green products in the present increases the product's appeal. Agerstrom and Bjorklund (2009) findings support the notion about emphasizing the future by suggesting that moral concern increases with distant future events compared to the near future (p. 267). An example from the study states that selfishness of people will diminish in parallel to a more distant future, such as affecting behavior about recycling garbage. Another study found that consumers with a chronic inclination towards high-level construal perceived environmental product features as more important when these features were presented as aiding consumers in achieving abstract goals, compared to those with a chronic tendency for low-level construal (Ramirez et al., 2015, p. 1655).

Furthermore, it is important to have positive attitudes towards environmental issues (Tang & Chooi, 2023, p. 26570). Tang & Chooi (2023) study showed that it is evident that if a group of people perceives local sustainability issues as distant, it may be advantageous to use tools that influence pro-environmental behavior, clearly stress the severity, and underscore core values on both individual and group levels to reduce skepticism (p. 26570, 26581). Conversely, for those who view sustainability issues as close, the focus should be on the practicality, convenience, and affordability of solutions.

Resulting in a growing emphasis on human influence on the natural environment have made organizations aiming at a more environmentally sustainable practice, concerning actions of both private and public businesses (O'Connor & Keil, 2017, p. 1). By using *Construal-Level Theory of Psychological Distance* by Trope and Liberman (2010) as a framework and interpreting the findings from previous studies, the theory can contribute with illuminating and analyzing the work of food- and beverage- producers in light of sustainability, which is the focus of this master thesis.

2.1.2 The Construal-Level Theory of Psychological Distance by Trope and Liberman (2010)

Construal-Level Theory of Psychological Distance (CLT) by Trope and Liberman (2010) proposes that people have the ability to remember past events, predict the future and understand other people's perspectives by creating abstract mental construals of objects that are distant (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440). Mental constructs are described as everything from predictions and memories, to speculations, which are different from a direct experience because it is not possible to experience what is not present. Psychological distance is defined as an experience subjective to an individual, which can be far or close from the person itself, in the present time (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440). The psychological distance to an object can vary depending on four distance variables; time, space, social distance and hypotheticality (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440). The dimensions are described as follows; time is whether it is happening now or in the distant future, space is at the present location or elsewhere, social distance is a close friend or a stranger, and hypotheticality is reality or imaginary (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 442).

The psychological distance and construal levels are connected and affect each other (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440). When the distance increases from the self, the abstraction of the construal will increase, and the same principle applies for the reversed way around (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440). As one approaches or moves away from an object, higher levels of construal are less prone to change compared to lower levels, which is why people use it more often when there is increasing psychological distance to a specific object (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 441). It is important to highlight that psychological distance and construal levels are not the same, but they are related (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 442). Construal levels are “what will occur”, whereas psychological distance involves perception of when, where, with whom, and whether an event will occur.

The construal levels vary from high-level construals to low-level construals (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 441). The high-level construals are more abstract representations than low-level construals. The central features are retained, but incidental features and irrelevant details are omitted. A concrete example from Trope and Liberman (2010) is going from a representation of “cellular phone”,

which is a lower level, to “communication device”, which is a higher level (p. 441). A high-level construal is not necessarily less useful than lower levels, and can contribute with adding information. High- and low- level construal fulfills distinct cognitive roles in that the low-level construals represent the now in time, while higher levels serve to go beyond the present moment (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 448).

There are two criteria that are used to distinguish the features of an item or an event in which are more high- or low- level; *Centrality and Subordination* (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 441). Centrality refers to the significance of a feature within an object or event. If a high-level feature is altered, it will have a greater impact on the overall meaning of the object or event compared to changing a low-level feature. For instance, the overall environmental impact of a product is influenced more by changes in its design and materials sourcing (high-level features) than by modifications to its packaging (low-level feature). This indicates that design and materials selection are higher-level features in determining sustainability compared to the packaging. Subordination refers to features of low-level that depend more on high-level features than the other way around (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 441). For instance, within a sustainability initiative for a company, the specific materials used in packaging (low-level feature) may only become relevant if it aligns with the broader goals (high-level feature) of reducing environmental impact and promoting recyclability. On the other hand, the overarching sustainability goals of the company would remain significant regardless of the specific materials chosen for packaging.

2.2 Communication

To impact the psychological distance people have towards climate change, organizations and their leaders need to communicate to their employees about the desired change. When communication increases, concern about climate change can increase, which can decrease the subjective experience of psychological distance (Spence et al., 2012. p. 967). Three ways a leader can do this is through visions, narratives and framing.

2.2.1 Vision

A key rhetorical strategy for leaders in establishing a shared purpose involves presenting a vision for the future (Carton & Lucas, 2018, p. 2124). In numerous instances, employees may have a vague understanding of their

company's objectives. Leaders have the opportunity to clarify this ambiguity by envisioning their organization successfully achieving its goals in the future, engaging in a mental time-travel exercise rather than focusing on the words they communicate. In short, leaders who can imagine their company succeed, will communicate greater visions with better imagery for their employees. When leaders have the ability to time travel and observe what the future will look like, their experience-based system will be activated (Carton & Lucas, 2018, p. 2124). They will then have the ability to see the organization's great success that they vision in what feels like a movie, which will create an inspiring vision for them to share without much conscious effort of which words to communicate the message with.

2.2.2 Narratives

Another way organizations try to influence employees' vision of the future is by shaping a future through strategic narratives called “futurescapes” (Rindova & Martins, 2022, p. 216). The futurescapes are imaginative constructs of futures that are plausible and desirable. The concept suggests that organizations can employ narratives to mold the future, shaping the beliefs of their stakeholders regarding potential and favorable outcomes (Rindova & Martins, 2022, p. 202). The idea is that the firm creates an image of what could be, a futurescape, and that the organization makes the audience believe that the sender can create a reality of the narrative. When creating strategic narratives that are persuasive, three mechanisms are theorized to be present (Rindova & Martins, 2022, p. 216). The first mechanism is to choose which elements that will represent different aspects of the firm's strategies in a way that is coherent. The second mechanism is to use a productive and creative way of thinking imaginatively to gain “futurescapes” that both have desirability and plausibility. The third and last mechanism is to coordinate imaginative inputs that are both creative and productive, and also minimize the strain between desirability and plausibility.

2.2.3 Framing

Stoknes (2014) posits that employing incorrect framings can undermine the sender's intended message to an audience (p. 162-163). Framing involves the implicit, often subconscious context surrounding concepts and discussions, shaping the perception of an issue (Stoknes, 2014, p. 162). A word or a concept can elicit different frames, which will affect how one thinks about what is told. In

terms of communication of the climate and climate change, messages have often been framed with loss aversion (Stoknes, 2014, p. 163). People tend to be averse to losses, and the use of fear-based communication tactics has been discovered to increase feelings of determinism, thereby promoting disengagement with climate change rather than fostering proactive involvement (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009, p. 370).

While fearful depictions of climate change may initially capture individuals' attention, but it can also lead to a sense of detachment and disempowerment, reducing personal engagement with the communicated issue (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009, p. 375). Communicated messages with fearful content can reinforce the perception that climate change is a distant problem (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009, p. 369). Findings suggest that effective engagement strategies must incorporate some level of connection with people's daily lives. As an example, if climate change showed adverse impacts both personally and locally, personal concern would rise (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009, p. 370).

2.3 From prosocial to pro-environmental motivation

We have opted to integrate theories of motivation into our research because they reveal the reasons behind our actions and shed light on how individuals are incentivized to pursue climate-related objectives, particularly within organizations (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 69). A basic theory within motivation is Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory, and according to their theory, every individual possesses three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy or self-determination, competence or mastery and relatedness or belonging (Bolstad, 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 69). According to this theory, these three essential psychological needs which every individual possesses, can either result in naturally emerged intrinsic motivation or not, depending on whether they are fulfilled or not (Bolstad, 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 69).

2.3.1 Prosocial motivation

We have established that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation exist, and therefore we aim to narrow it down and focus on another type of motivation; prosocial motivation and even further; pro environmental motivation. The difference between intrinsic motivation and prosocial motivation can be explained by the central aspect of prosocial work motivation is the relational architecture of jobs which increase motivation and the potential to positively affect someone else

(Grant, 2007, p. 395). First, prosocial motivation emphasizes the social aspect of work, because prosocial motivation highlights how managers can improve the experience of their employees and other organizational members (Grant, 2007, p. 393). Those who are acting in a prosocial way could be described as “givers”, since their principal concern is that their actions benefit others, rather than expecting something in return. In short, they act selfless and can possibly achieve more success in the long run.

2.3.2 Pro-environmental motivation

Most people have not directly experienced natural phenomena like climate change more than indirectly, such as water- and air- pollution. This is because we do not directly feel it in our bodies if the air is somewhat worse than what we are used to (Stern et al., 1995, p. 1613). Most people are familiar with this through the media and the influence that comes from there, but still, some individuals act pro-environmental. From the actors perspective, pro-environmental behavior (PEB) is seen as a way of helping the environment (Nolan & Schultz, 2013, p. 627) and is characterized as actions taken with the intention of reducing one`s adverse effects on the natural environment (Sollberger, 2015, p. 6). If the behavior helps to mitigate or prevent environmental problems, one could argue that from an impact oriented approach, such behaviors could be considered pro-environmental. One could also characterize this type of behavior as being responsible or protective in terms of the environment. Therefore, one could argue that environmental action can be considered as a type of prosocial behavior.

Traditionally, prosocial behavior emphasizes helping, and one should identify who or what is being helped from the behavior (Nolan & Schultz, 2013, p. 627). If one argues that pro-environmental behavior is prosocial, one must show that people benefit from the actions, as well as the actors having intentions to benefit others. This type of motivation and actions can help mitigate harmful consequences for planet earth, directly through protecting and conserving nature as well as indirectly by influencing social programs and politics (Stern et al., 1995, p. 1616). In the aspect of impact, there are two types of actions one can choose between, which is through political action or by working voluntarily and directly with organizations which are actively working towards reaching for example United Nations sustainability goals (United Nations, n.d. a). The political way is through for example voting for candidates which are concerned with

sustainability, while the other is eating less meat, being concerned with food-waste and similar actions (Nolan & Schultz, 2015, p. 627).

There are several ways to define pro-environmental intentions or behavior, for example; behavior which is undertaken to change the environment, while it is also important to consider that it is not the face value that matters, but the intentions behind the act (Kaiser & Wilson, 2004, p. 1532). Another way to explain it is as one's mission to not leave an impact on the natural part of the world, for example the reduction of waste and usage of energy. Therefore, one can argue that with a small amount of self-interest, the intention and concern is for the next generation, the ecosystem and other species on the planet. From the intention-focused perspective, it can be described from the standpoint of the actor as behavior undertaken with the intention of altering the environment, usually for the better. This suggests that environmental concern can drive behavior independently and may not always lead to observable effects (Stern, 2000, p. 408).

2.3.3 Employee green behavior

Employee green behavior (EGB) is when individuals engage in and contribute to environmental sustainability (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 87). This definition emphasizes several key aspects. Firstly, it focuses on employees rather than organizations. Secondly, the definition of employee green behaviors outlined here concentrates on the actions employees undertake in relation to their work activities (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 88). Individual personality traits and employee's perception about their workplace and organizational context is related to EGB (Katz et al., 2022, p. 1153). By emphasizing actions and behaviors, the definition excludes outcomes and consequences beyond the employee's control (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 88).

3.0. Research method

3.1 Research contexts

This study was carried out during the winter and spring of 2024 across 12 food and beverage producing companies in Norway. The research encompassed a variety of businesses spanning different segments of the value chain. These

companies exhibited diversity in size and ownership structure; some were small family-owned enterprises, while others were large corporations listed on the stock exchange. Additionally, the businesses encompassed a range of sectors, including breweries, wholesalers, and food producers, with some engaging in the production of both beverages and food items.

Due to the current era where sustainability is a paramount concept, we observe its significant influence on how the businesses we have interviewed reflect upon and address sustainability within their organizations. New regulations and requirements are placing pressure on these businesses to accelerate their efforts in reducing carbon emissions. The recent EU-directive is impacting how businesses strive to become more sustainable, alongside their assessments of Scope 1, Scope 2, and Scope 3 emissions.

The EU directive was adopted in 2022 and introduces new regulations on how businesses should report on their sustainability practices (Finansavisen, 2024.; NHO, n.d.; Regjeringen, 2023b). Known as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), this directive is scheduled to be implemented into action in 2024-2025. According to “Finansavisen” (2024), the reporting required by the CSRD will be of equal importance to financial reporting. Sustainability reporting aims to contribute to a sustainable economy and aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (Regjeringen, 2023b). The directive will measure sustainability aspects, including environmental, social, and governance factors, commonly referred to as “ESG” (NHO, n.d.). The implementation of the new EU directive on sustainability reporting will enhance transparency among companies, facilitating easier comparisons and comprehension of their sustainability efforts (Regjeringen, 2023a) This initiative serves as a platform for companies to showcase their respective sustainability endeavors.

The GHG protocol stands for “Greenhouse Gas Protocol” and is divided into three different emissions; Scope 1, scope 2, and scope 3 (Greenhouse Gas Protocol, 2004, p. 25). The first scope is emission controlled or owned by the business itself, and is therefore directly tied to for example the production of products produced in machines owned by the company. The second scope of emission is indirect GHG generated from purchased and consumed energy. The third scope is emission produced both backwards and forwards in the value chain of the business, such as for example outsourced transportation of products.

3.2 Research design

Multiple Case Study

The current study adopts a case study approach, involving 12 participating companies. According to Bell et al. (2022) this study employs a multiple case study design due to its inclusion of more than one case (p. 70). The chosen 12 cases are not the companies nor the persons involved, but rather how sustainability initiatives are communicated within each company, what the sustainability initiatives are, and how one motivates members to become engaged and cooperate. Sustainability directors have contributed to the data obtained to give insight into the multiple case study, and these are the individuals within each company that works on how to make it comprehensible for everyone. When having that amount of cases, the goal is to achieve saturation in the end (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 545). If saturation is not reached after 12 cases, there is a possibility to select even more cases. For the studies purpose, we concluded that 12 cases were enough but also needed. This is because we wanted to gain a rich understanding of different ways of minimizing distance to climate change internally, increase motivation for sustainable work, and learn about several initiatives to sustainability.

To address inquiries regarding sustainability initiatives, employee engagement, and the impact of distance on motivation, a qualitative research approach was deemed suitable for gaining insights into these aspects. Qualitative research methodology revolves around comprehending the social dynamics within a given context through the lens of participants' perspectives (Bell et al., 2022, p. 362). It involves delving into the interpretations and perceptions of individuals within their natural settings, without the researcher imposing influence for data collection purposes. This approach aims to provide nuanced descriptions of people, their interactions, and the environments they inhabit, thereby offering a deeper understanding of social realities on their own terms. Hence, qualitative research aligns well with the research objectives, as it aims to interpret the experiences of individuals and understand the dynamics within each participant's company.

This research is an exploratory study. According to Saunders et al. (2019), an exploratory study is valuable when wanting to ask questions that are open, such

as beginning with “What” and “How”, which will give insight into a topic (p. 186-187). This type of study offers flexibility and adaptability to change, aligning with our goals for the data collection. This approach provides the researcher with the freedom to delve into whatever insights participants may offer during the unstructured interview. Abductive reasoning starts with puzzling observations in relation to phenomena and then seeks to develop explanations for them, often by working between data and theory (Bell et al., 2022, p. 587). This is the method we have chosen, because it fits well with qualitative research and our chosen topic.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Secondary data

Secondary data is gathered and generated for other purposes than research, including organizational documents and publicly available datasets (Bell et al., 2022, p. 13). Through our study, we have used secondary data to gain knowledge of the companies which have participated in our study, such as companies' websites and internal documents that some of the companies shared with us. Due to the mutual agreement about confidentiality and anonymity we have not used secondary data explicitly in the thesis, but rather for our own understanding before and after the interviews. If we had referred to websites and internal documents, this could have led to identification of the companies, possibly violating our commitments to anonymity.

3.3.2 Primary data

In this research, the central source of data is acquired from interviews. This type of data is called primary data, which according to Bell et al. (2022) is data gathered by the same researcher who also handles the analysis (p. 13). The primary data consists of 12 interviews. Interviews are a well-known research method frequently employed in qualitative research (Bell et al., 2022, p. 427). Two primary approaches exist for conducting qualitative interviews: unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews (Bell et al., 2022, p. 428-429). This study employs semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Semi-structured interviews involve the use of an interview guide, typically a list of pertinent topics to cover. However, interviewers are not required to follow this list chronologically. Instead, they are encouraged to respond naturally as the conversation progresses.

3.3.3 Interview guide

An interview guide was developed in advance of the semi-structured interviews. Such a guide might simply consist of brief and easily understandable notes to jog memory (Bell et al., 2022, p. 430). In this study, we created a list encompassing overarching themes along with multiple questions pertaining to each theme (see Appendix 1). Even though the guide consisted of several questions, we made sure that the list was rather flexible. The opportunity to go between themes and questions during the different interviews was therefore made easy, keeping the conversations natural for the participant. We made sure that the interview guide was memorized, which supported a more natural conversation rather than having to read up each theme and question during interviews, as well as trying to be active but not intrusive during the interviews (Bell et al., 2022, p. 433).

3.3.4 Participants

In our study, we carried out 12 interviews, which serve as our primary data source. Participants were recruited through email responses to our invitation to participate. We disseminated information about the research to various individuals in companies within the food and beverage industry in Norway. Some recipients responded affirmatively, expressing their willingness to participate. Others referred us to colleagues within their organization who were more closely aligned with the focus of our research, also called snowball sampling internally in the companies (Bell et al., 2022, p. 594). The participants were employees directly involved in sustainability efforts, holding various job titles but sharing similar areas of responsibility. A common role across companies was “sustainability director”, while a few have sustainable responsibility incorporated into another leading role, such as the CEO. The similar roles make the companies comparable.

Companies	Nickname
Company 1	Food brand 1
Company 2	Beverage and food producer
Company 3	Beverage producer 1
Company 4	Snacks producer 1
Company 5	Snacks producer 2
Company 6	Beverage producer 2
Company 7	Brand house 1
Company 8	Brand house 2
Company 9	Food brand 2
Company 10	Snacks producer 3
Company 11	Brand house 3
Company 12	Food brand 3

Table 1: Overview of participating companies

3.3.4 Conduction of interviews

Three of the interviews were conducted face to face, where we visited 2 of the company's headquarters, and one interview was conducted at BI Norwegian Business School, Campus Oslo. Further, we have conducted eight synchronous online interviews at Teams (Bell et al., 2022, p. 441). This decision was made based upon wishes from the participants and convenience due to geographical boundaries (Bell et al., 2022, p. 443). Furthermore, one interview was conducted in writing, and we used email as the primary source of communication.

Choosing to use 'Teams' made the range of the participants wider, which as a consequence gave us a broader spectrum of information. Furthermore, it is easier for participants to attend if they can attend from anywhere and stay in a familiar environment (Bell et al., 2022, p. 443). On the other hand, a challenge we met at several occasions was bad connection and reduced sound quality which could have affected the validity of the analysis. At last, the one interview

conducted in writing and over email could be argued to have limited our perception of the particular company. This was due to non-verbal communication, missing reactions, and a lack of body language as interviewers.

3.3.5 Administration of data

During the interviews, we utilized "Nettskjema" to record, obtaining written consent from the participants. Developed by the University of Oslo, Nettskjema is a web-based tool designed for creating, storing, and managing data collection (Nettskjema, n.d.). It upholds stringent security measures to facilitate safe and seamless data storage and is endorsed by "Tjenester for Sensitive Data" (TSD), "Region komiteer for medisinsk og helsefaglig forskningsetikk" (REK), and Sikt (Nettskjema, n.d.).

Nettskjema facilitated both audio-recording and transcription of the collected data, allowing us to obtain transcribed interviews shortly after their completion. This approach is advantageous as it ensures the interviews are fresh in memory, aiding in the detection of errors. Upon receiving the transcriptions from Nettskjema, we meticulously assessed their quality against audio recordings to confirm accuracy in terms of interpretations, grammatical correctness and avoidance of repetition (Bell et al., 2022, p. 438). This can potentially increase the validity of our findings.

3.4 Data analysis

3.4.1 Thematic Analysis

The core of the thematic approach lies in identifying themes or patterns within the dataset at hand, in our case; 12 transcribed interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This method involves coding the data into various themes or patterns to facilitate further analysis. Its flexibility allows for its application to datasets of varying sizes, yielding comprehensive explanations and descriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78)

Coding involves sorting data into categories with similar meanings, aiming to facilitate analysis accessibility (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 653). It is crucial for handling large datasets and organizing them into various codes. When statements convey similar meanings, they are often grouped together under one code. While codes may originate from different sources, ours primarily stem from participant statements extracted from the dataset, termed *in vivo* codes developed from our data (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 655). For instance, "From kroners to

kilograms” is a statement from one of the participating companies.

To organize the thematic analysis, we chose to use Delve as a tool, to exploit today's technology at hand (Delve, n.d.). The process of coding can be observed in the Appendix 2. Based on our experience, Delve is a tool that makes coding organized and structured. Delve is an online Computer-aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) tool tailored for qualitative research coding (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 657, 797). This platform enables the analysis of interview transcripts, fostering continuous insights. Additionally, under some themes, there were several sub-categories. For example, “Sustainability Strategy” acts as a broad umbrella, with various specific codes nested underneath, like “Organization and responsibility” and “Dilemmas and trade-offs in sustainability work,” which relate to using more Norwegian raw materials and recycling electricity and heat. Furthermore, some codes stand alone without subcategories, such as “From kroner to kilos,” representing the central focus of the thesis.

Throughout the data coding process, we continuously evaluated and refined our codes to ensure they cohesively addressed the research question (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 658). While searching for codes, we focused on several key elements, notably repetitions, metaphors, as well as similarities and differences (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 88-91). Coding extensive datasets presents challenges, particularly with thematic analysis characterized by its flexible nature and lack of specific guidelines (Bell et al., 2022, p. 528, 595). Consequently, this resulted in consolidating the number of codes and transitioning from broad terms like “Communication” to more nuanced terms derived directly from the data, such as “Collecting stories for hope, pride and progress, and “Conveying stories through many channels.

3.5 Research quality

Assessing the quality of research involves two key criteria commonly employed in business method research: Reliability and Validity (Bell et al., 2022, p. 48). Reliability pertains to the consistency and replicability of the research, ensuring that findings can be reproduced. Validity, on the other hand, concerns the soundness and accuracy of the study's conclusion, based on what you intended to measure (Bell et al., 2022, p. 48, 368). These criteria have been subject to discussion because of the applicability to qualitative research (Bell et al., 2022, p. 368). In this section, we will evaluate the reliability and validity for this research

3.5.1 *Reliability*

External reliability is challenging to attain through qualitative research based on the setting it is carried out in (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, from Bell et al., 2022, p. 368-369). Replicating the exact social setting multiple times can be challenging. This study, conducted by two master's degree students, involved participants from food-producing companies. Interviews were primarily conducted via 'Teams', with some conducted 'in person'. To ensure external reliability, future researchers should adopt a similar social role and endeavor to recreate the same social setting (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, from Bell et al., 2022, p. 369). Internal reliability is the degree of agreement between observations between the researchers (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, from Bell et al., 2022, p. 369). Both researchers in this case participated in all the interviews, and there was no disagreement noticed between observations. A quality check of the lack of disagreement could easily be avoided by hearing at the voice recording and reading the transcribed materials.

Other measures that can potentially have affected this research are values and biases. The personal values of a researcher may influence their beliefs and lead to biases against certain participants, potentially impacting the research outcomes (Bell et al., 2022, p. 38-39). For this instance, we acted professionally through the data collection, and tried to be as neutral as possible by being aware of potential biases that could arise. On the other hand, the participant can also affect the research. Participant bias is factors that can prompt false responses (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 214). To mitigate the risk of participant bias, we ensured that all participants could schedule interviews at their convenience. As previously noted, the majority of interviews were conducted via "Teams", allowing participants to choose their preferred location, such as their office. For in-person interviews, we primarily visited participants in their office space, while on one occasion, a participant came to our location. In such instances, we took measures to establish a secure environment by reserving a group room.

3.5.2 *Validity*

Internal validity refers to the degree of match between developed theoretical ideas and the observations by the researchers, which most often is recognized as a strength for qualitative research due to participation in a social setting over time (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, from Bell et al., 2022, p. 369). For this research, it is

acknowledged that 12 interviews can contribute to internal validity of the research. The participating companies have given the research rich and various insights into the research question, which is based on theoretical ideas. An alternative way for evaluating qualitative research and comparable to internal validity is credibility. In order for a study to be considered credible, the depiction of the participants' socially constructed realities must align with their intended meanings (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 217). It is interpreted that by having 12 interviewed companies with different sizes and ways to operate in the industry, it contributes to the credibility of the study due to collecting a larger amount of data. Also, the use of discussing findings with our supervisor can increase credibility. Conversely, the integrity of our research may encounter potential limitations as a result of the anonymity and confidentiality assurances we have provided. In our commitment to uphold these promises, we have accepted the risk of compromising the validity of our results, as we must be cautious in the dissemination of our findings. In relation to the internal validity and credibility of this study, it may be compromised.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Considering ethical standards is crucial when conducting research. Ethical considerations pertain to the appropriate conduct towards research participants and the safeguarding of their rights (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 252). After the interview subjects agreed to participate in the research, we made sure to share a confidentiality agreement with each individual participant and their respective company, which we as researchers also signed and agreed on. Since this is not a straightforward matter, we got their written consent to use the data gathered for the purpose of the thesis, as well as providing assurance for the participant and aiming for informed consent (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 265-266). The agreement included confidentiality about all information gained from the data collection and secured electronic storage of data.

At the beginning of each interview, we provided an overview of the purpose of the study and assured participants of their right to anonymity. As the research is centered around 12 companies within a closely related industry, it is important to ensure and maintain anonymity for the participating subjects and their companies as promised. Consequently, we communicated that individuals would not be identifiable through their statements and that all information would be

anonymized to ensure complete confidentiality. Further, we requested permission to record the interviews, clarifying that recordings would solely be used for transcription purposes, saved confidential, following which all data would be deleted (Van Aken & Berends, 2018, p. 162). This also ensures that the statements are being used as they were meant to, and that the representation of it is accurate to how it was stated originally.

4.0 Findings

In this chapter, we present our findings organized into themes and sub-themes. We begin by examining environmental factors affecting companies' sustainability efforts and identifying where emissions occur in their supply chains. Next, we explore how sustainability is integrated into company strategies and the division of responsibilities. Dilemmas faced with potential trade-offs follow with a table divided into strategic steps of sustainability initiatives. We note that different sustainability efforts are influenced by employee involvement, leading to the importance of employee green behavior. Finally, we delve into the core of this thesis by presenting ways of reducing the gap between employees and sustainability, and emphasizing the importance of internal communication. In the last paragraph of this chapter, a summarizing table of key findings will be described and can be observed in appendix 3. As the main part of this study, the focus has been on how companies make sustainability close, tangible and comprehensible for employees.

4.1 New requirements for reporting emissions

Having conducted 12 interviews, we see that there are external forces pulling most companies in the same direction towards sustainability; the European Union (EU) directive and the Greenhouse Gas protocol, which includes scope 1, scope 2 and scope 3 (Referring to chapter 3.1). It is evident that the EU Directive significantly influences businesses and serves as an external catalyst for sustainability initiatives within the organizations we have interviewed;

I always have to say that the course that the EU is driving, that is the biggest driving force for effecting change. That is the spearhead. They are the ones pushing forward, and we just have to keep up. And I am fully on board with that. (Brand House 3)

The EU Directive can be perceived as a necessary push towards a better future and safeguarding the well-being of future generations. While compliance with the EU directive is compulsory rather than voluntary, it can still be seen as providing guidelines. This is in accordance with “Brand House 3” statement that the new requirements for reporting are helpful for effective implementation; “Of course, the new EU directive and the new EU reporting standard are very helpful for anyone responsible for sustainability in a company”. The nature of the problem creates a sense of urgency and a need to take action. However, with specific guidelines outlining necessary actions, both companies and individuals tasked with sustainability efforts can better understand their responsibilities.

4.1.1. Explaining the Supply Chain via Categories of Emissions

Observing the supply chain through the three scopes of emissions (Referring to chapter 3.1) reveals where companies have their largest emissions. Significant scope 1 emissions often come from oil boilers or transportation; “Scope 1 pertains to the direct emissions from equipment that one owns. So, when we have a fleet of vehicles, the emissions from that fleet are considered scope 1” (Snacks Producer 1). Regarding scope 1 emissions, management decisions are crucial for sustainability investments such as heat pumps, solar panels or electric boilers, and these efforts do not require direct employee involvement but can foster workplace pride.

Scope 2 emissions (referring to chapter 3.1) are indirect emissions such as electricity and heat. Electricity costs more in urban areas than in rural ones, as noted;

One of the reasons why we have lower electricity prices compared to the biggest cities in Norway. And we have been very fortunate with low electricity prices compared to them. (Beverage producer 2)

This disparity can lead to perceived unfairness based on business location, but also as an incentive for keeping production of consumer goods in different parts of Norway. Investments in for example heat pumps can reduce companies' scope 2 emissions.

Scope 3 includes pollution outside companies' control (referring to chapter 3.1), covering the value chain backwards and forwards from production. Companies must work with suppliers to meet climate goals; “To achieve our climate reduction goals, our raw material suppliers must also do a lot. We are in

dialogue with all of them...” (Food Brand 2). Companies prefer local farmers, but Norwegian agriculture's limitations necessitate imports, creating challenges. As noted by “Beverage and Food Producer”, imports complicate the ability to set demands.

Continuing down the value chain, production is followed by transportation. Norway's geography presents challenges. “Beverage and Food Producer” and “Food Brand 3” highlight that producing some raw materials outside Norway can increase transportation emissions due to increased distances. Balancing pollution reduction with import costs and market competition is challenging and requires careful considerations. Food and beverage companies focus on their core operations, as noted; “And then those proficient in transportation can handle it, possibly optimizing routes, cutting emissions, and investing in cutting-edge technology” and “What this means is that we sell to a wholesaler who then distributes to stores, allowing us to concentrate on what we do best” (Snacks Producer 1). Outsourcing transportation improves efficiency and can potentially reduce emissions.

Suppliers are crucial but pose challenges: “It affects us a lot, but our supplier has higher revenue than us, so there is a power dynamic there,” and “We cannot tell our supplier that we cannot buy from them, because they have a monopoly on the goods we need” (Brand House 3). These statements show how revenue differences and supplier monopolies disadvantage smaller companies.

4.2 Is sustainability integrated into the strategy?

Considering the new regulations of sustainability reporting (Referring to chapter 3.1), sustainability has become crucial for companies producing food and beverage. It is interesting to try to comprehend both the similar and different ways they are working towards integrating sustainability into their strategy. In this part, we will highlight the integration of sustainability into companies' strategies, how they have organized responsibility, dilemmas they may encounter and sustainability initiatives divided into strategic steps. This establishes the foundation of our thesis. Despite the relevance of these topics, we have chosen not to explore them extensively as our research primarily focuses on internal processes. Our main focus is how companies work towards reducing the psychological distance between their employees and sustainability, which are the internal processes in the company's way to become sustainable and cultivate green

employee behavior. However, we see it as necessary for the proper understanding of the thesis to involve the information below.

Sustainability is integrated in different ways in the 12 cases. There appear to be multiple approaches to advancing towards a more sustainable organization, with varying degrees of emphasis placed on these efforts. Few of the companies claim that sustainability is fully integrated and implemented into their company's strategy, but some assert that sustainability is inherent to their identity. This is illustrated by a statement; “We have no one who has overarching sustainability responsibility. It is part of our backbone. It lies within the vision” (Beverage and Food Producer). Sustainability seems to have been a part of these companies from the start and is the broader strategy. Another statement illustrates a different way of integration and its downside;

So based on that, we have sustainability as one of the five pillars in the company's strategy. However, I also notice that when you have five pillars in the strategy, sustainability is the one that comes last. (Snacks Producer 1)

Other companies, as illustrated in the statement above, have sustainability as a part of the strategy alongside other important categories. This highlights that sustainability is integrated as a part of a broader strategy within the company. With a strategy divided into five pillars, management has the flexibility to prioritize different areas. Therefore, it is important to reflect upon how serious the integration of sustainability is within the organization's overall strategy, beyond being listed as one of the pillars. From the statement and its context, we interpret that there is an aspiration that sustainability will gain higher priority in the future in a list of different areas to excel. Based on the statement and its context, we interpret that there is hope for sustainability to become a more prominent priority across a range of areas for future excellence.

Some companies demonstrate the integration of sustainability as part of their strategy and their efforts to achieve goals in relation to it increases its integrity. This is exemplified by the following statement; “We have a very clear strategy and goals on how we are going to work on it. We now report on a monthly basis and continuously work on improvements” (Beverage Producer 1). It reflects the company's strong focus on clarity and direction in their approach towards integrating sustainability. Their commitment to regular monthly reporting

indicates a dedication to transparency and accountability, while the emphasis on continuous improvement suggests a proactive attitude towards refining their process and achieving their goals. A similar statement shows off how another company has a similar approach; “We have a dedicated sustainability strategy, (...). I ensure that we execute the projects we commit to, and that we are able to measure the actions we take” (Snacks Producer 2). Ensuring completion of action creates credibility that the company takes integration of sustainability seriously, and measuring the actions creates transparency which increases the integrity of taking responsibility.

4.2.1 Organization and responsibility

Organizations adopt varied approaches to managing sustainability, as evidenced by 12 case studies. A common strategy is to designate a specific individual to lead sustainability efforts, ensuring responsibility and fostering advancement. Alternatively, some organizations form specialized teams to share responsibilities and enhance engagement with sustainability issues. As companies develop, they seem to transition from centralized roles to weaving sustainability throughout different departments, embedding it closer to the core of the company. One firm stands out by not assigning sustainability to specific individuals, teams or departments. Instead, they have made sustainability the company's core value from the start, making it a natural part of the firm.

4.2.2 Dilemmas and trade-offs in sustainability work

In this section of the findings, we will highlight dilemmas that have emerged when considering sustainability. These are divided into profitability vs sustainability, health vs taste preferences, and footprint vs quality. An interesting question to highlight is to try to understand how far companies are willing to go on behalf of their reputation and what are the trade-offs?

Profitability versus sustainability are one dilemma companies meet, which is underlined in the following statement;

There are desires to be sustainable. But of course, we have to make money, it does not help if we are sustainable but not making money.

Because then we cease to exist. So, it is always that assessment, weighing profitability against sustainability. (Brand House 3)

Without selling products, businesses will go bankrupt while other businesses will gain market shares. Despite pollution concerns in production of

food and beverage, optimizing current practices seem to be the best solution at hand; “As we deal with food production, there are inherent processes where shutting down farms or eliminating manure is not practical” (Brand House 1). Food and beverage are a fundamental need for humans, and someone needs to produce it for survival of the human race. This highlights the need to improve sustainability in production rather than cease food production.

Another aspect of dilemmas are reliant on active customer engagement, illustrated by health versus taste preferences. Customers naturally gravitate toward familiar and flavorful products, which means businesses must ensure that sustainability measures do not lead to unwanted products. Introducing these measures gradually helps maintain customer appeal, as illustrated by the statement, “We have been doing it over the years so that customers will not notice that we are making changes” (Food brand 1). Gradual introduction of changes in flavors fosters sustainable dietary habits without alienating customers. A balance between appealing and healthy products is crucial, as losing customer interest can hinder a company’s ability to sustain its business and contribute to environmental goals. One of the interviewed companies underlines that when changes in the ingredients adversely affect the taste of a product, changes will stop. It seems like the company is not willing to do a trade-off.

Due to the industry we have chosen to study, there are reasons for problems of doing total trade-offs. For example;

We are dealing with food and beverage, so we will naturally continue to have a business. However, we aim for faster growth in the healthier portfolio than in our upper portfolio. (Beverage producer 1)

This illustrates the focus on taste, where key ingredients are less healthy but crucial for flavor. As stated, “But at the same time, we are all about pleasure. (...). Can we make it a bit less unhealthy?” (Snacks Producer 1). These companies strive to improve and balance financial goals with sustainability, even if trade-offs could be necessary for optimizing sustainability in a health aspect.

Footprint versus quality are one last dilemma that seems significant for the companies producing food and beverage. Packaging on products is a contributor to emissions in the industry. Several of the companies have made significant changes to packaging in an effort to reduce emissions. A challenge emerges in that recyclable packaging performs suboptimal, as illustrated in this statement;

We have made a lot of changes, for example, to our products so they do look a bit paler and duller. But that is how it is, and we have spent a lot of time on it because recycled plastic is not as strong. (Beverage Producer 1)

It demonstrates that the company is prioritizing environmental friendliness over the aesthetic appeal of the product. A trade-off has been handled between colorful and prominent products versus paler and duller products, where the last alternative has been elected. The dilemma lies in the fact that customers may not notice the product in the same manner as before, which is a risk for the company's market shares. Brighter product packaging may catch the attention of the eyes faster by having better visibility, being better marketing objects, and consequently, superior financial outcomes.

Another challenge is the process of manufacturing the new packaging; should one experiment and fail so that it becomes disadvantageous in the long term? A company we interviewed explained issues with a significant part of the packaging when using recycled plastic, which supports the statement from Beverage producer 1 on the disadvantage of using recycled plastic. This highlights the discrepancy between what is theoretically optimal for sustainable production and what is practically achievable, resulting in emissions greater than necessary for producing the required packaging. Another challenge arises with certain types of products, as stated by “Beverage Producer 2”, “... If the plastic used for packaging has been recycled multiple times, it can actually affect the taste.” This illustrates how improving packaging can compromise the product's taste, potentially ruining the original product. Even though there are several dilemmas and potential trade-offs companies encounter, there are already initiatives in place within the companies to become more sustainable, as illustrated in *Table 2* below.

4.2.3 Table 2: Sustainability initiatives divided into strategic steps by using “The six steps model for healthy growth” by Stoknes (2021).

Strategic steps	Examples observed across the 12 companies
Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial incentives for electric bikes and public transportation - Competition to reduce food waste in private homes - Food donations
House cleaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recycling garbage - Solar panels, heat pumps, electric boilers
Greening supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Replacement of materials; packaging - Purchasing local raw materials - Sustainability requirements for suppliers
Greener operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Replace old technology with new and more resource efficient machines - Electrical vehicle fleet (in house) - Improved route planning initiative
Product portfolio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction of salt, sugar, saturated fat and alcohol - More sustainable packaging
Business models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None representative examples observed from our findings, but it is about incorporate sustainability into all parts of the business

Table 2 represents sustainability initiatives divided into strategic steps by using “The six steps for healthy growth” by Stoknes (2021). We have examined six categories of initiatives which we observe as a pattern across all the companies we have interviewed. While some initiatives influence employees' personal life and impact their daily work routines, other initiatives are not directly affected by employees. Nevertheless, it is crucial to involve employees in the rollout of these initiatives; while some require employee engagement, others do not.

Outreach contains the external investments a business contributes to (Stoknes, 2021). *House cleaning* focuses on one's own building, assets and management systems. *Greening Supply* involves setting requirements for suppliers, purchasing more efficient materials and resource productivity. *Greener operations* emphasizes redesigning operations for optimal resource productivity through the whole system. *Product portfolio* involves phasing out products which

are wasteful and creating new innovative products. At last, *Business models* are about changing the current model towards circularity while adding more value for stakeholders (Stoknes, 2021).

4.3 Employee green behavior

Some of the sustainability initiatives in table 2 are dependent on employee engagement, while others are not. A part of the core in our thesis is sustainability initiatives directly impacting employees and how to engage employees in these. These are the internal processes in the company's road to a sustainable future and employee green behavior. In the following parts, we will highlight how companies try to cultivate employees' green behavior and initiatives that rely on employee engagement and behavior.

Even though decisions are primarily made by management, and companies typically operate with a top-down approach, active support and involvement from employees are often necessary. As stated; “I believe it is about involving people. It is not just something the management can decide on and say: Now, we are going to focus on sustainability” (Beverage producer 1). While the implementation of solar panels and heat pumps represents sustainability initiatives that management can choose to adopt, the impact of this may not be visible or significantly affect employees' daily tasks. There are other initiatives that could have a more direct impact on employees. This is because many initiatives are shown to require employee participation, training, and engagement in order to ensure a positive reception to change.

The following statement identifies how employees might be involved; “Each employee at (...) should have identified how they can contribute to improving the company's sustainability through personal development goals” (Snacks Producer 1). The importance of sustainability to each individual can vary, influencing their personal development goals and consequently, the extent of green employee behavior they exhibit. To be able to take responsibility and act towards sustainability, the employee needs to be aware of and understand the company's objectives to set their own personal development goals in alignment to the overarching goals.

When integrating sustainability responsibilities into every segment of the business, opportunities are at hand for each individual to work on the objective and incorporate it into employees' day at work.

I believe that to engage people, you need to make it about their everyday work. ... set them on the right track regarding what within their role can contribute to sustainability. (Snacks Producer 1)

When sustainability responsibilities become a part of routine work, employees' green behavior can grow. Employee green behavior can be interpreted as important for an optimal implementation of many sustainability initiatives in companies, as illustrated in *Table 2* in Chapter 4.2.3.

4.4 Reducing the distance to sustainability: Kroners to Kilograms

Earlier in chapter 4.0 we have analyzed data that contributes to creating the foundation for our thesis, but we have also looked into deeper parts such as sustainability initiatives and employee green behavior. In the following section, we will explore four internal factors driving sustainability efforts within the companies. These are the core of the thesis. The internal factors inside the companies reduce the distance between employees and sustainability when making events, objects or things more close, comprehensible and tangible.

4.4.1 The time dimension

This section delves into the time aspect of assessing environmental challenges, climate change, and sustainability. If it is perceived distant or close to the members. Generally, these issues are perceived and evaluated as distant future problems. The goal is to bring them into the present, highlighting the urgency of taking action now for it to be meaningful. Several of the participating companies stress the importance of making sustainability efforts and related information more immediate for each individual. By bringing these initiatives closer in time, there is an expectation that more people will actively engage in creating a greener organization. This is likely because the issues feel more tangible, comprehensible, and relevant when information is closer in time.

Brand House 2 states that “Instead of talking a lot about what we are going to do in 2050, we are talking about what we are going to do this year”. An approach could be to talk about events as near in time, such as what can be done here and now, even though the UN highlights large goals in 2030 and 2050 (Referring to chapter 1.3). Targets for 2030 or 2050 seem distant in time, leading to a perception that action can be delayed. However, the need for action is immediate, and everyone must contribute. A year passes quickly, and discussing goals for the upcoming year can make the timeline feel more tangible and urgent.

Making sustainability and its challenges more relatable to employees at all levels today emphasizes the importance of immediate action. This approach can foster greater participation and engagement in sustainability efforts. Also, “Sustainability must be a part of the daily operations” (Brand House 3). Integrating sustainability into daily operations can heighten the sense of immediacy and the importance of taking action in the present moment. By making sustainability a routine part of work, it allows for incremental progress toward larger, long-term goals while also achieving small victories through tangible steps in the present.

4.4.2 Physical size is more tangible

When presenting effects of emission into something that are tangible for most people, it can potentially create a closeness to the actual amount of pollution. As stated “And then it is precisely about transitioning from dealing with kroner to dealing with kilograms” (Snacks Producer 1). As the quote suggests, it can be challenging to comprehend the amount of emissions when expressed in monetary terms rather than kilograms. The context of the statement also highlights the importance of presenting pollution in a clear manner, enabling people to understand the actual extent of emissions, such as those from plastic packaging. To make sustainability concrete for employees, it is crucial to provide clear direction on what needs to be done and what actions have been taken. This will not work out if the members do not understand the actual problem. Connecting these efforts directly to production, packaging, warehouse operations, or similar tasks, enhances understanding and fosters a sense of inclusion among all employees.

One interpretation is that most employees may not grasp the environmental impact of emissions expressed in kroner as effectively as when expressed in kilograms. It is assumed that most people have a greater understanding of how much 10 kilograms versus 1000 kilograms are in terms of emissions. People do not necessarily know how huge an amount of 1000 kg emissions are, but we can imagine and understand that it is a lot. This can be supported by another statement saying that “The climate can seem abstract, but when the concrete is tied to reducing energy consumption in a factory, (...), it becomes much simpler.” (Brand House 3). Instead of discussing in terms of kroners, shifting the focus to kilograms, or from general talk about the environment to actual initiatives to

reduce the impact on the environment, can create a more tangible explanation. Kilograms and Kroners can be physically observed. The difference lies in that each member can physically feel how much 10 kilograms feels in terms of weight. 10 kilograms emissions or reduced emission from the factories, can physically be felt if one lifts 10 kilograms of weight. For employees working in the factories that are producing food and beverage, actually lifting physical objects that weigh the same as reduced energy consumption can create a firm understanding of measures mitigating the effects on the environment.

Another reflection regarding this is that physical objects that are tangible creates more engagement, which is emphasized in the statement: “Things that easily grab attention are those you can physically show. It is not very exciting to hear that we have reduced energy and water consumption” (Beverage Producer 1). Building upon this statement and as mentioned earlier, incorporating tangible representations such as weights that depict kilograms of emissions reduced can spark enthusiasm among members and simultaneously cultivate curiosity and a desire to learn. It can be presented in a fun and interactive way. Conversely, a presentation solely focused on reductions in consumption of various resources might diminish engagement, except if you are especially interested in numbers. An alternative approach could involve supplementing numerical data and abstract terminology regarding reduced consumption with physical demonstrations to enhance engagement. Over time, more members of the organization would probably understand the more abstract explanations, which can be a positive additional factor for these companies' sustainability work.

4.4.3 Abstract terminology that lacks impact

The following statement illuminates one aspect of the challenge to make sustainability closer and more tangible for employees;

I want to start by saying that the first thing is not to use the word sustainability. It is so fluffy and big that it is hard to understand what is in it. (Food Brand 3)

The term sustainability is commonly employed by upper management across various businesses, but when quantified, many employees struggle to grasp its essence. Consequently, sustainability becomes an elusive term, lacking clear understanding, often viewed merely as a grandiose notion without personal relevance. As described in the quote by “Food Brand 3”, the concept becomes

fuzzy, leading to efforts to minimize its use. Instead, employing more straightforward language and explanations directly linked to sustainability can foster positive actions without relying on the term itself.

A significant challenge lies in ensuring clarity and understanding across all levels of the organization, especially with the new regulations. Sustainability can often feel remote and employs unfamiliar terminology; “Because one can perceive climate and sustainability as very distant concepts, merely buzzwords that people toss around without taking substantive action” (Snacks Producer 2). It is interpreted that without tangible actions toward sustainability, there will be little visible progress to showcase, resulting in no meaningful change. Another statement underlines this observation; “What I see as a challenge is that with all the new EU legislation, there is an overwhelming amount of abbreviations, terms, and things that almost feel alienating” (Snacks Producer 1). The key is likely to reduce alienation by employing words that describe terms and abbreviations that people can relate to, comprehend and use resources to explain the meaning of it. Abbreviations, such as the one illustrated below, need to be explained, along with why it is important: “Just mentioning CSRD can feel like a buzzword, as they say” (Snacks Producer 1).

Delving deeper into the issue of buzzwords and complex language, the EU directive requires all aspects to be quantifiable and comparable, necessitating numerical reporting and measurement universally (Referring to chapter 3.1). This is depicted as problematic; “There is a lot of documentation work involved, which feels remote for many operational staff who are vital resources at the local department level” (Food Brand 3). The statement illustrates the issue of alienation which can generate less meaningful work and challenge autonomy. The context highlights the unfortunate alienation of sustainability efforts, affecting both direct and indirect contributors. Administrative staff experience alienation because essential initiatives and narratives are overshadowed by numbers and reports. Meanwhile, operational staff face it as well, since they are tasked with implementing the initiatives but may not understand the reasons behind them due to a lack of involvement and thereby comprehension. A potential issue arises when employees across different levels fail to grasp the requirements outlined in the EU directive, primarily due to a lack of comprehension. Reporting often involves intricate terminology unfamiliar to the average employee, further

exacerbating the issue. Consequently, the burden of reporting falls on the leadership group, potentially widening the gap between the employees and sustainability efforts as well as employee detachment from sustainability efforts.

A continuation of the impacts of the EU Directive includes the potential imposition of guidelines across scopes 1, 2, and 3 from the GHG protocol (Referring to chapter 3.1). “When you talk about scope 1, scope 2, and scope 3, not many people understand what that entails” (Brand House 3). The content of these concepts are neither comprehensible nor intuitive to understand. This highlights the importance of not using abstract terminology, or if one does, there is a need to ensure that the majority understands it by securing knowledge-sharing.

There are ways to transform sustainability from abstract jargon and terminology into something more concrete and tangible by implementing initiatives that employees can connect with both during and outside of work hours. Using language and narratives that are meaningful and relatable, such as the example of “Too Good to Go”; “(...) Like “Too Good to Go”, which is a lot of fun, things they can relate to. Understanding and grasping what they are doing” (Snacks Producer 2) can help bridge this gap. As the statement suggests, initiatives should be relatable and comprehensible for employees. Rather than relying solely on lofty rhetoric and promises, they should be understandable and actionable, while also demonstrating a positive impact.

4.4.4 Connect overarching objectives with incremental achievements

As long as things are feasible, and there are things we can actually do something about, and you have ownership, so it is not just a bit of an adventure. So the goals must be realistic, and then you get people on board. (Beverage producer 2)

To address this, we need to establish goals that are relevant to everyone and are clearly defined. Sustainability should not be idealized or made to sound mystical. Sustainability can appear idealistic and be presented as a beneficial adventure for all, even though in reality it may not have that effect on everyone. This is explained in the statement by Brand House 3; “We try to break it down so that each individual understands the more specific tasks they need to work on” while also presenting that it contributes to cultivating comprehension. It should be straightforward and practical, allowing everyone to easily grasp and engage with

it.

As stated by Beverage Producer 1 “But we have a long way to go, it is definitely not finished. Most companies probably have a long way to go.” There is a lot of work to do to reach the sustainability goals, while they are expanding in scope and perhaps become less defined. Then, the challenge of ensuring that an entire organization comprehends, feels motivated by, and integrates them into their daily work routines becomes increasingly important. Several of the companies explained their use of sustainability goals, highlighted by the following statement “We have selected sustainable development goals that address all the pillars we need to work on” (Snack Producer 2). This illustrates the use of SDGs (referring to chapter 1.3) into their company’s work towards a more sustainable future, which several of the interviewed cases have. For most, it seems like guidelines towards broader goals, which they try to break down into more comprehensible intermediate goals. These lower goals can lead to incremental achievements for the company and employees. When objectives become overly ambitious and lack clear boundaries, employees may struggle to grasp their significance or relevance to their roles. This is illustrated by the statement; “I would say that when you set ambitious goals, it is challenging to achieve them” (Food Brand 3). These goals might feel overwhelming and abstract to employees who do not work directly with them. When the company is able to fit their choices of SDGs to focus on their areas that need improvement, it can generate sensemaking for employees. Even if an employee is not in a department directly involved with sustainability, every department contributes to the broader community in its own way. This underscores the importance of integrating sustainability goals across all departments and engaging all employees.

“I work closely with specific individuals, but the key point is that all goals are broken down into manageable actions, reflected in our scorecards for everyone involved” (Food Brand 2). The statement from Food Brand 2 illustrates the importance of a clear understanding of how employees' contributions align with these lofty objectives, employees may feel disconnected from the organizational mission, diminishing their sense of purpose and commitment. Therefore, it is crucial to break down these expansive goals into smaller, actionable steps that are easily understandable and relatable to individuals at all levels of the organization. Brand House 3 states that “Everyone has their specific sustainability goals that are

aligned with the overarching sustainability goals we have at the top,” which underlines the importance of fitting sustainability goals to each department. This can potentially bring it closer to each employee, but at the same time have the whole organization tied together by having goals and actions aligned with the overarching goals from the top. Working towards a common goal, where everyone succeeds and collaborates, can create a sense of connection to both the workplace and the job. Additionally, it can enhance team spirit and pride in the workplace and the tasks performed. Also, by providing clarity with specific goals to each department, and demonstrating the direct impact of employee’s efforts on the larger vision, employees can find renewed motivation and a sense of ownership in driving the organization towards its objectives.

As an attempt to make sustainability tangible, we refer to the statement “We are quite clear about what we do, and why we do it” (Food Brand 1). This illustrates how some companies address the challenge of breaking down goals and making it clear how they implement their choices and why. Employees gain insight into the decisions being made and a better understanding of the process to why the company chose to do so. Including employees in decision-making can increase motivation and foster a sense of ownership over both the process and the objectives they are striving to achieve. This can also be observed in the statement “We have an overarching goal, and then we try to break it down, so that each individual understands the more specific tasks they should work on” (Brand House 3), which generate specific needed actions to take and a sense of that the employees are needed in the work towards overarching objectives. This is supported by;

I work closely with certain individuals, but I see the point that all goals need to be broken down into very manageable actions, which are included in all scorecards, as we call them, for everyone working on relevant tasks.
(Food Brand 2)

Here, different companies demonstrate how they proceed to try to make sustainability less grandiose and alienating, by including and breaking it down. This also enables all employees to see how their goals and intermediate goals contribute to the collective effort and how it contributes to achieving the organization's overarching goals. “Brand house 2” and “Food brand 3” illustrates how employees contribute to the ultimate aspirations in their daily work as stated;

“We are talking about why solar cells are important and how they work. We are talking about the challenges associated with wind power and why we have it.” (Brand house 2) and ; “We are sorting residual waste and, for example, cardboard. This is an ongoing job of raising awareness as described in our procedures.” (Food brand 3). This allows individuals to see direct results of their actions and the way they conduct their workday, which can make the overarching goals feel less remote and distant. In other words, the companies have implemented incentives aligned with their strategy. These incentives seem to be designed to engage employees more effectively, making the sustainability goals feel more proximate and comprehensible. By reducing the psychological distance, the companies aim to foster a deeper commitment to their sustainability initiatives.

4.5 Communication

Communication is interpreted from the data collection as an important part for the companies to convey information about sustainability, and as a tool to create engagement for employees working towards a sustainable company. In the following sections, we will go through our findings of communication.

4.5.1 Collecting stories for hope, pride and progress

It is about gathering the good stories, (...). We become very heavy on reporting with forms and what not, but not on the storytelling around it. I believe there are many stories to tell.” (Brand House 1)

Storytelling has been observed as a recurring theme in several of the participating companies as an important and prioritized aspect of sustainability efforts. This can be exemplified by the statement “What is our success story, and where can we better equip ourselves for the future?” (Beverage Producer 2). Such work can be understood as part of the motivational efforts and can influence engagement towards becoming a more sustainable company. By sharing the success stories to employees, it can influence them to work even more and harder towards improvement and achieving goals. Some of the companies acknowledge that they should also become even better at conveying stories from the company, where they have the opportunity to exploit their strengths to improve their business.

Another noteworthy aspect is the possibility of blending concrete objective data and compelling success stories. Emphasizing the observation of the factual outcome of an initiative through impartial measurement is interpreted as key. One

might interpret that data in numbers can make sustainability distant, but it is to argue that numbers and hard facts might be appealing to some. Furthermore, neutral and objective data might be easier to compare, preferably towards earlier years or quarters of a year. Hence, a blend of success stories and neutral, objective data may prove more effective than relying solely on either, which underlines the importance of using more story telling.

It is all about creating positive, or good, stories. Feeling that pride of working for a company that cares about sustainability. That is important. So, we are constantly trying to create stories that evoke that sense of pride. And by doing so, we can be motivated to contribute even more. (Snacks Producer 1)

Sharing success stories empowers employees to feel a sense of ownership to the company's sustainability initiatives. One particular statement illuminates the importance of recognizing employees for their efforts; “It is not me who takes credit for it. It is about highlighting the people in the organization who are actually doing something” (Beverage Producer 1). On the contrary, it may feel distant if employees do not receive recognition for their own efforts. Hence, many participating companies stress the importance of recognizing individual employees or teams for their contributions and the impact they make. This is vital for generating pride and ownership in valuable initiatives and proposals, ensuring that every employee feels valued and listened to. At best, this can cultivate a larger amount of suggestions, and create a lower barrier for sharing ideas and success stories.

On the other hand, how does one secure an increase of hope, pride and progress in general using communication? The statement below illustrates how one company in general uses communication to bring awareness to sustainability and its seriousness.

We have a presentation. And then we have 5-6 minutes on sustainability. And there we bring up that... The earth is burning. But what does that really mean for me? And then we play a bit on emotions, but at the same time, you risk getting the opposite effect. (Snacks Producer 2)

The statement is contradictory, highlighted by the brief time allocated for conveying sustainability information, noted as 5-6 minutes. Considering a typical work week spans around 40 hours, dedicating such a short time to sustainability

suggests the company's minimal focus on this issue. It also hints at an appeal to emotions, exemplified by "the Earth is Burning." One interpretation is that if there is little concern for sustainability, this metaphor may seem insincere, lacking connection to reality. Moreover, while emotions are somewhat exploited, the company also shows concern towards resistance to sustainability, indicating a cautious approach rather than wholehearted commitment to achieve optimal results. Hence, communication through many channels can increase time spent on sustainability and help companies increase their time used to communicate the issues.

4.5.2 *Conveying stories through many channels*

A shared commonality across the 12 cases is a core business containing production of food and beverage. Typically, they have central headquarters, housing management and support functions with factories dispersed. This distribution can make it challenging to communicate information to everyone simultaneously. Thus, using a media or a channel where all employees can access information at their convenience becomes advantageous. This is illustrated by the statement; "We utilize our intranets, we have our own social platform where we always strive to inform as much as possible" (Brand House 2). These platforms provide excellent opportunities to engage everyone, as long as the company is dedicated to sharing information in this manner. Success stories can be shared in a smarter and more effective way. Moreover, the utilization of internal communication and intranet underscores the appreciation for sustainability initiatives, serving as easy tools to inspire and motivate others.

The majority of the companies stated that they utilize intranet channels for sharing information about the company in general. It is evident that there are various channels available for this purpose. An example is; "We employ 'Viva Engage', a type of workplace chat where employees are encouraged to share things. So, I encourage that." (Beverage Producer 1). Another example is;

We use 'Workplace', which is a Facebook at-work channel. There, we provide a lot of information, ranging from updates on what we are doing to where we have been giving presentations, and tips on movies to watch. (Food Brand 2)

The use of intranet and the internet in general can enable easier and quicker sharing of information, thereby saving time and resources in communicating. Intranet can contribute to increasing motivation and engagement regarding information and initiatives related to sustainability within the company, by making information such as success stories easily available. The intranet channels are not simply for the management to use, but employees are also encouraged to take active part. This can foster ownership of the process and motivation to work even harder. Some of the companies have shared creative ways of cultivating engagement around sustainability through internal channels, illustrated in the example above. It can motivate others to utilize the tools in similar ways. Not just sharing achievements, but also tips on how to do more or learn more is interpreted as an active way of using the tools at hand. It is about exploiting what one has available to create interest and willingness to contribute.

4.6 Summary of key findings

Table 3 summarizes key findings from this study, focusing on the main findings across 12 companies (see appendix 3). The left column lists subheadings from Chapter 4.0, while the middle column condenses each subheadings findings into a comprehensible summary. The column to the right gives examples of statements to illustrate the reality of each subheading.

5.0 Discussion

In this chapter, we will start with discussing ways companies work towards reducing distance between employees and sustainability, followed by the role communication plays as building stepping stones towards the ultimate aspiration, which is a fully sustainable business model. After discussing the core of this thesis, we will present discussions about other central elements; Employee Green Behavior, sustainability initiatives categorized by Stoknes (2021) sustainability ladder and sustainability dilemmas. At last, a discussion of previous studies are highlighted. All together, the focus has been on how companies make sustainability close, tangible and comprehensible for employees. The structure of this part will not follow the chronological order from chapter *4.0 Findings* because we find this structure more meaningful for this part by starting out with the key elements of the discussion.

5.1 Reducing the distance; Kroners to Kilograms

We identified four ways companies worked to reduce distance. First, shortening the time frame is crucial, which was supported by a statement that highlighted talking about what is to happen within the upcoming year, compared to goals of 2050. Second, using physical measurements like kilograms for emissions instead of money makes the issue more tangible for employees. Third, avoiding abstract terms and complex abbreviations when discussing sustainability helps. Finally, achieving incremental milestones makes larger objectives more tangible. The new sustainability reporting requirements; the EU directive (Finansavisen, 2024.; NHO, n.d.; Regjeringen, 2023b) and The Green House Gas Protocol with the three scopes of emissions (Greenhouse Gas Protocol, 2004, p. 25), seem unfamiliar to most people, causing alienation which is reflected in our findings. Previous studies indicate that feeling psychologically close to climate change boosts sustainability actions (Maiella et al., 2020, p. 1; Spence et al., 2012, p. 967; Wang et al., 2019, p. 9-10). Comparing our results with these studies highlights how action can decrease when the challenge feels distant, emphasizing the importance of reducing the psychological distance to sustainability. These four methods of reducing distance from our study can be compared to the four dimensions affecting psychological distance in Construal Level Theory (CLT).

As the findings revealed, most companies emphasized integrating sustainability into daily operations and focusing on current actions rather than distant goals set for 2050. According to Carton (2018), this will help employees see the connection between their daily tasks and the ultimate aspirations of the firm by cultivating meaning (p. 329). Our findings underlines that sustainability is happening “now” in several of the companies, making it psychological close to one dimension of CLT; time (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440, 442). One interpretation is that intrinsic motivation will rise as individuals experience relatedness to the present problem as sustainability in time, potentially enhancing their competence in addressing the issue through direct exposure (Bolstad, 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 69). There is a probability that prosocial motivation can increase in line with intrinsic motivation among employees if sustainability is connected to the present time, and lead to more pro-environmental motivation (Grant, 2007, p. 395; Nolan & Schultz, 2013, p. 627; Sollberger, 2015, p. 6). Our data revealed that competitions regarding sustainability initiatives in private

homes of employees were popular and cultivated motivation in the present time. Research has shown that increased concern and pro-environmental actions correlate with psychological proximity to climate change (Maiella et al., 2020, p. 1; Spence et al., 2012, p. 967; Wang et al., 2019, p. 9-10). It is assumed that regular exposure to sustainability at work can increase concern about the climate and heighten awareness of sustainability issues. Employee engagement and contributions to sustainability can cultivate employee green behavior at work (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 87-88).

The findings stated that it is easier to comprehend what one can observe in a present location, such as kilograms of emissions. As one firm stated, physical objects grab attention more easily than talking about how much water is reserved. Physical objects can be present at the current location, while talking about the amount of water reserved has most likely happened previously, highlighting somewhere else. This emphasizes the “present location” rather than “elsewhere” in the second dimension of space in CLT, making sustainability even more psychological close (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440, 442). Physically showing how much water is reserved for example through a water tank is optimal, which can generate meaning for employees with physical proof of a link between the ultimate aspiration and the effects of employees work (Carton, 2018, p. 329). As a distinction, mental representations of size are not necessarily that tangible, nor easy to understand the reality of. One firm stated the importance of shifting focus from “Kroners to Kilograms”, revealing that it is easier to comprehend kilograms of emissions. Having the ability to sense the weight of kilograms of emissions at the present location can reduce the psychological distance compared to mental constructs of weight or amount of money. Trope and Liberman (2010) proposes that people can create mental constructs of distanced objects, such as the past or present (p. 440). This underlines the possibility of mental time travel to another place referring to “elsewhere”, but the “present location” can be experienced at this point in time without forming mental constructs.

As our findings revealed, abstract terminology created distance to the issue of sustainability. “CSR D” was one mentioned abbreviation making it difficult. Most of the companies stated that complex abbreviations and terms makes it difficult to create comprehension and engagement, and that training is a necessary action to grasp it. Concrete and relatable terms are important for

comprehension which can be related to being “a close friend”; something familiar to one and thereby reducing the social distance making sustainability a step closer in terms of psychological distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440, 442). As of Carton`s (2018) study, this can generate more meaning to employees' daily work (p. 329). Abstract terminology is “a stranger”, increasing the social distance. Our findings illustrate that especially the new requirements for reporting on sustainability feels strange to most, increasing the social distance. One firm stated that reporting can feel remote for many operational staff. Without comprehension and with a feeling of strangeness, workers can have challenges understanding the need of and integrating it into their work routines. A negative consequence could be reduced intrinsic motivation due to limited competence (Bolstad, 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 69). Stated from several of the companies, words connected to sustainability have often been looked upon as ‘buzzwords’ not resulting in action. Subconscious contexts that surround concepts can affect the interpretation of the message, also called framing (Stoknes, 2014, p. 162). Leading to an unwillingness to interpret such words as important and its seriousness. Previous research illustrates that it can be beneficial to be in the middle of the dimension of social distance, where too close can be too immediate and too far can be too remote (Sparkman & Macdonald, 2021, p. 6). Using a fine line between necessary formal and everyday wording can be optimal.

All of the companies involved in this research have stated the use of having subgoals and incremental achievements along the way to the broader, overarching goals. When companies link overarching objectives with incremental achievements, they create opportunities to make broad and distant goals, like SDGs (United Nations, n.d. a) more tangible by breaking them down into subgoals and concrete actions. The actions themselves generate a reality of the goals, due to setting the stage of how the company can reach the overarching goals, in distinction to only operating with overarching objectives. This makes sustainability tangible and immediate for employees, which can increase sustainable behaviors (Schill & Shaw, 2016, p. 357). One firm stated the importance of making sure that goals are realistic, not just an adventure. This highlights that hypotheticality becomes more of a reality than imaginary, which brings sustainability even closer in terms of psychological distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440, 442). Actions can lead to incremental achievements along

the way, and increase motivation of employees towards the broader goal (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 69). In contrast, hypotheticality as imaginary can be interpreted to not increase motivation due to the unrealistic sense of it (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 442). This scenario might occur if companies solely utilize the broader SDGs as general guidelines for their actions without incremental achievements, or if leaders communicate uninspiring visions (Carton & Lucas, 2018, p. 2124). This reflects the importance of not turning sustainability into an adventure, which lacks realism and is imaginary, but connecting it to reality through actions. According to Carton (2018), this can cultivate a sense of meaningful work to employees (p. 329).

Our findings present four mechanisms that companies use to reduce distance between employees and sustainability, which are comparable to Trope and Liberman's theory (2010). Employees are likely to have a better chance of linking their work to overarching objectives with fewer abstract concepts and more specific details, cultivating meaning (Carton, 2018). As our data revealed, the management needs to make the reasons transparent for why they do what they do and how they do it to create sensemaking for employees. Carton (2018) illuminated four sensegiving actions in which leaders can embrace to help employees understand the link between their daily tasks and the ultimate aspiration of the organization (p. 329, 335-338). The ultimate aspirations of companies have the potential of becoming rather elusive, especially if it is followed by visions that lack a vivid image (Carton & Lucas, 2018, p. 2124). When employees have the ability to bridge this gap, it is interpreted that the subjective experience of psychological distance is reduced (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440), and there is a bigger chance for higher concern for climate change (Spence et al., 2012, p. 967). Some of Cartons (2018) sensegiving actions can be compared to our findings.

Our findings regarding bridging incremental achievements with overarching objectives can be understood in parallel to Carton's (2018) second sensegiving action which is to move attention to concrete organizational objectives from the ultimate aspiration (Carton, 2018, p. 335-338). Both strategies seek to render distant and abstract objectives more achievable by dissecting them into manageable steps. This approach boosts employee engagement and comprehension, as the tangible nature of lower-level goals facilitates a clearer

understanding compared to overarching aspirations (Carton, 2018, p. 326).

The findings about connecting overarching objectives with incremental achievements can again be seen in comparison to a third sensegiving action called communication of key milestones on the pathway to the goal (Carton, 2018, 335-338). Both actions involve breaking down large goals into smaller, manageable components. By communicating key milestones, organizations provide transparency and clarity about the progress made towards achieving overarching objectives. Similarly, linking overarching objectives with incremental achievements involves identifying and celebrating small successes along the way, which contributes to a sense of progress and momentum towards the ultimate goal. Therefore, both actions contribute to maintaining focus, motivation and alignment throughout the goal attainment process. Increased motivation can incentivize employees towards the broader goal (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 69), underlining the importance of increasing motivation.

Our findings revealed that both physical size grabs attention easier and the lack of impact abstract terminology has, can be compared to connecting abstract ideas with real-life events which is Carton's fourth sensegiving action (Carton, 2018, p. 335-338). The first interpretation is that connecting abstract concepts with real-life events reduces their abstraction by making them tangible for most employees, supported by Trope and Liberman (2010, p. 440). Tangible elements, such as physical objects that can be observed and touched, create a closer connection to real-life events, and can increase pro-environmental behavior (Maiella et al., 2020, p. 1; Schill & Shaw, 2016, p. 357). Conversely, abstract ideas and terminology are perceived as distant and less understandable. By grounding abstract ideas in real-life events and simplifying abstract terminology, comprehension of these concepts can be enhanced. Through these approaches, organizations can bridge the gap between abstract concepts and practical application, improving comprehension, engagement, and implementation of organizational goals, thereby their ultimate aspirations (Carton, 2018).

5.2 Communication

Our findings revealed that communication within companies plays a pivotal role in disseminating information across various departments, and the realm of sustainability is no exception. The majority of the companies participating in this research emphasize the significance of collecting and

disseminating narratives that foster hope, pride, and progress among employees. Communication can be seen as creating stepping stones along the way towards a broader goal of sustainability; the ultimate aspiration to the company (Carton, 2018, p. 329). With communication, employees get involved and informed, letting them take active choices to contribute towards the broader goal, step by step. These narratives, termed "Futurescapes", serve as strategic stories that shape employees' perceptions of the future, allowing organizations to influence their visions (Rindova & Martins, 2022, p. 216). Through storytelling, companies possess the power to inspire employees, instilling a sense of purpose and the belief that each employee can contribute to these narratives of success. Additionally, these stories credit the individual behind the initiatives, rather than the team or letting it go unnoticed. Narratives will be more effectively communicated from leaders to employees if the leaders can envision their company succeeding (Carton & Lucas, 2018, p. 2124). Inspiring visions can facilitate the communication of these stories. Motivation, defined as the driving force behind individuals' actions (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 69), underscores the importance of sharing success stories. In this context, the goal is to motivate employees to act towards building a more sustainable company. If sharing success stories proves to be an effective tool to strengthen motivation, as it appears to be, it presents itself as an effective tool.

By examining storytelling from our findings in light of CLT, one can understand the rationale behind this phenomenon. According to our findings, almost all the companies wish to share information and stories with their employees in the right manner. Firstly, recounting past success stories could potentially bring one emotionally closer to the actual event, despite its temporal distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 442). Moreover, stories about future successes that one could potentially be part of may feel closer in time due to the motivation to take action. This can also cultivate greater motivation for the future and revive success stories. Secondly, since the stories occurred within the company, they diminish distance in space by being at the present location. The prospect of achieving success within the current company can foster optimistic sentiments. Additionally, the social distance from the success stories could range from "a close friend to a stranger" (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 442). If the success is attained by a friend, the distance decreases; likewise, this principle can

apply to employees within the same social circle in a company, further reducing social distance. Lastly, for stories shared within companies to have an impact, they must be grounded in truth, representing a part of reality as our findings illustrate. If the stories are purely fictional, they may not be perceived as feasible to achieve. As nearly all the companies stressed the importance of inclusivity despite physical distances, it is crucial to share both their goals. Doing so can make the goals more tangible, leading to greater commitment and goal-directed behavior (Su et al., 2022, p. 952). This highlights the importance of telling realistic stories rather than imaginary, to create a sense of closeness to the goal (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 442).

A recurring theme illustrated by the greater part of the companies was that enhancing efforts to share stories is crucial, given the abundance of narratives that need to be disseminated. If stories have the potential to narrow the psychological gap between employees and climate change or sustainability, it is conceivable that pro-environmental behaviors may be spurred into action (Nolan & Schultz, 2013, p. 627). A reason for this can be due to feelings of meaningful work for employees after getting to know the success stories (Carton, 2018, p. 329). Inaccurate framing choices to the success stories, such as wording or concepts, can undermine the sender's intended message to the audience (Stoknes, 2014, p. 162-163). This shows that companies need to be mindful of how they communicate, particularly through stories, to achieve the desired effects. This is illustrated by one of the companies, which stated that they use the metaphor “the earth is burning” to cultivate engagement, but that might not be the most efficient solution.

Considering the differences in employees, all companies should assess if their employees have an increasing psychological distance towards local sustainability or not (Tang & Chooi, 2023, p. 26581). With this as a foundation, one should adjust the path ahead, and emphasize minimal expenses rather than the severity. Using framing in the correct manner might cultivate pro-environmental behavior, which encompasses actions aimed at lessening one's detrimental impact on the natural world (Sollberger, 2015, p. 6) and contributing positively to environmental welfare (Nolan & Shultz, 2013, p. 627). This could include activities like recycling waste at the workplace, which is revealed in our data as an initiative executed by all the companies. Framing emphasizes how such stories are

conveyed and how one's perception is of it (Stoknes, 2014, p. 162-163). Fearful depictions of climate change may capture attention at first, but can reduce personal engagement which increases the doubts about using wording such as "the earth is burning" (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009, p. 375). A distinction is this way of putting it into words can lack realism, cultivating a larger psychological distance to climate change in terms of hypotheticality as imaginary (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 442). In simpler terms, the earth is not actually on fire, which can reduce the seriousness of the message for some by its framing (Stoknes, 2014, p. 162-163). Emphasizing the importance of sharing successful and positive stories to build motivation and engagement to act pro-environmentally, which can result in employees being willing to make personal sacrifices to obtain the goal (Wang et al., 2019, p. 9-10).

There are various channels for conveying stories through messages, and as observed in our findings, internal communication with a focus on the relevance for each employee and individual is emphasized by all the companies. Intranets are the company's own communication site, where they post about the business, stories, and other types of vital information. This dissemination of information may potentially occur at either a national or international scale, rather than solely at a local level. As a result, it could ensure that it does not feel excessively proximate, yet neither too remote. These tools facilitate communication and have the potential to involve everyone across departments, regardless of different locations or large facilities. Before the implementation of internal channels like the internet, one can interpret that the psychological distance to different events, information, and engagement in themes were more distanced with high-level construals (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440). Sharing success stories via intranets can help decrease psychological distance and provide detailed information fast, resulting in lower construal levels (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 441) and increase climate concern and pro-environmental actions (Maiella et al., 2020, p. 1; Spence et al., 2012, p. 967; Wang et al., 2019, p. 9-10). Therefore, with our findings as a foundation, reaching out to an entire organization is proven to be effective. As Carton's (2018) study highlights, communication along the way towards the broader goal is important and generates meaning to employees' work which underlines the significance of internal communication channels.

As previously stated, internal communication plays a vital role in effective communication. About half of the companies revealed in the interviews that their production sites and various offices are distributed around Norway, which makes internal communication crucial. Effective internal communication and storytelling can yield many positive results, making it essential to utilize these strategies. Using an example from our findings, the company shares its pro-environmental initiatives through its channels, which can be seen as an encouragement for employees to act similarly, leading to employee green behavior (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 87). This highlights the importance of portraying these initiatives as a close future, which can cultivate constructing near future events (Lieberman et al., 2002, p. 530). As a result, when a company operates pro-environmentally, it can inspire and motivate employee green behavior, allowing this mindset to flourish within the organization (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 87).

According to our findings and Stoknes (2021), the overarching objective is to make the entire company sustainable, with a business model aligned accordingly. Our data indicates that nearly all companies are striving towards this. Consequently, while communication is deemed significant, it may not qualify as a high-level feature for sustainability, or centrality (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 441). Communication's significance in a company's sustainability efforts is interpreted as a low-level feature, known as subordination in CLT. Low-level features depend on high-level features, becoming relevant only when aligned with them. In alignment to Carton (2018) communication can be compared to stepping stones along the way towards the ultimate aspiration (p. 326). Communication is therefore a significant stepping stone towards cultivating engagement and motivation by creating meaning for employees towards the larger goal. Explained in a different way, communication is observed as a way to connect employees to sustainability. A relevant example to bridge this gap, which is recurring from most of the companies, is sharing success stories. Even though the management usually executes the majority of decisions, from our findings it is deemed crucial to gain employee agreement to reach the ultimate aspiration (Carton, 2018), also called a fully sustainable business model (Stoknes, 2021).

Therefore, changes in communication have less impact on the overall meaning of these goals compared to changes in the high-level features. However, communication is still seen as an important tool for companies to leverage and

foster engagement in sustainability efforts. The ultimate aspiration is the renewed business model, which makes it a high level feature to reach what can be assumed as the goal of the model “*The six steps model for healthy growth*” (Stoknes, 2021). Communication could be seen as affecting the steps towards the sustainable business model.

5.3 How can a company engage employees in sustainability?

5.3.1. Employee green behavior

According to the findings, involvement of employees is important when working towards sustainability. One firm stated the importance of having employees evaluating how they could contribute to the organization's sustainability through personal development goals. Widespread distribution of sustainability responsibility across departments can reduce the psychological distance by limiting the distance of the dimensions: time, space, social distance and hypotheticality (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440-441). On the background of the theory, sustainability responsibility will then be a part of more employees work each day, happen in their office, become a familiar acquaintance and be a part of the reality they must handle. This can increase the occurrence of sustainable behaviors (Schill & Shaw, 2016, p. 357) and cultivate meaning for employees with their work and the firm's ultimate aspirations (Carton, 2018, p. 329). The perspective is influenced by whether sustainability is integrated into the strategy or is the strategy itself, where the findings reveal that there is only one company having sustainability as the strategy itself.

Using our findings as a foundation, most companies believe that engaging and motivating employees can cultivate the desired behaviors. In specifics, some companies stated that making conversations about relevant topics with operational staff can make sustainability less abstract. Inclusion from the management can possibly make sustainability more tangible and reduce the subjective experience of psychological distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440), potentially increasing the employee green behavior across the company (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 87). Even though employee green behavior concerns how individuals within an organization behave voluntarily, it still decreases the psychological distance in CLT; as sustainability becomes less of an abstract concept but rather something tangible, increasing the likelihood of pro-environmental actions (Maiella et al.,

2020, p. 1; Wang et al., 2019, p. 9-10).

This brings the discussion to the pro-environmental behavior of employees. Revealed from our data, one can observe that the majority of the companies have implemented different initiatives such as solar panels or heat pumps, for example, on storage facilities. These minor milestones can help steer companies in the right direction and assist in achieving the long-term goal of fully sustainable production. Employees who engage in more green behaviors are likely to feel a greater sense of pride compared to those who are less willing to adopt such behaviors (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 87). Pro-environmental behavior is about a way of helping the environment (Nolan & Schultz, 2013, p. 627) and is characterized as actions taken with the intention of reducing one's adverse effects on the natural environment (Sollberger, 2015, p. 6). This can result in the sustainability initiatives of the company no longer being hypothetical imagery, which refers to being unrealistic, but transitioning into hypothetical reality and actual actions for employees to observe (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 442). As one of the four dimensions in CLT, this can strengthen the sense of proximity for subjective experience of psychological distance. Carton (2018) study supports this, demonstrating that subordinate goals, such as installing solar panels, contribute to and creates sensemaking to ultimate aspirations and shift the focus to concrete initiatives (p. 335-338).

5.3.2. Employee involvement in sustainability efforts drives the larger goal

With sustainability efforts, businesses must navigate through various dilemmas and trade-offs, sacrificing certain aspects for others which our findings reveal. *Table 2.0*, in chapter 4.2.3, presents sustainability initiatives that have been selected and implemented. These initiatives are categorized according to Stoknes' (2021) sustainability ladder, 'the six steps for healthy growth'. Some of the initiatives could be described as dependent on employees while others are implemented by one management decision. The sustainability ladder by Stoknes (2021) depends a lot on management rather than employees. For tasks like Greening Supply and Greener Operations, it is management who decides and implements these changes. This can make employees feel disconnected to sustainability because they are not directly involved in decisions regarding the issue, nor receiving help to create a link between employees' daily tasks and the company's ultimate aspiration (Carton, 2018, p. 329). Reduced employee

engagement in pro-environmental actions can be a risk, as studies indicate that closeness to the issue is crucial for taking such actions (Maiella et al., 2020, p. 1; Wang et al., 2019, p. 9-10). As a result, much of the sustainability ladder is controlled by management, which makes it hard to motivate employees since they do not have much say in these matters.

First we look at the initiatives affecting and depending on employees. House cleaning initiatives such as recycling garbage and solar panels. These initiatives are common in most of the interviewed companies. The initiatives are tangible and easy to comprehend, they serve as an important means to an end, and contribute to the ultimate aspiration (Carton, 2018). Moreover, integrating sustainability initiatives into all parts of the company as a business model might seem abstract to most employees. Moreover, observing that most decisions regarding the business model are taken and executed by the management. As reflected from our data, none of the firms have a fully sustainable business model that is representative for the companies as a whole. Although, one can argue that business models can be distant to most, as well as solar panels. A distinction is that solar panels are physical objects, which makes it more of a tangible object than a sustainable business model. Compared to recycling garbage, solar panels are not necessarily something that are 'top of mind' for employees everyday at work. Proximal initiatives such as competitions to reduce food waste cultivate more enthusiasm and motivation than solar panels, probably generating more meaning to employees' daily tasks and connecting it to the ultimate aspiration of the company (Carton, 2018, p. 329). This corresponds with research prior to our study explaining for example how recycling behavior is seen as proximal, and that people are more likely to act pro-environmentally when the psychological distance is decreasing (Maiella et al., 2020, p. 1; Schill & Shaw, 2016, p. 357).

On the contrary, employees who are experiencing increasing psychological distance, for example, when the management is reevaluating and changing the business model, are less inclined to make personal sacrifices to reach the goal (Wang et al. 2019, p. 9-10). A reason for this can be a lack of felt connection between the employee's work day and the ultimate aspiration to the firm, which is the business model (Carton, 2018, p. 329). Relating this to subordination and centrality (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p.441), it can be observed that these initiatives are secondary, thus subordinate, yet they serve as stepping

stones toward the ultimate aspiration (Carton, 2018, p. 326). This underlines how all six steps in the model contribute to the ultimate aspiration; changing the business model (Stoknes, 2021).

Additionally, it is important to stress that many of the initiatives rely on the employees willingness to engage, making their motivation crucial. To connect it with the examples from *Table 2.0* in chapter 4.2.3, one could explore adopting new technology to enhance resource utilization and promote environmental sustainability. In diverse variations, we noticed this trend to be consistent across all the interviewed companies. These initiatives hinge on employees gaining proficiency in operating machinery, a task that can pose challenges. While not pivotal on a large scale, such initiatives nonetheless occupy a significant portion of many individuals' work routines. These initiatives vary depending on the angle from which the measure is approached; the company's actions are pro-environmental (Nolan & Schultz, 2013, p. 627), whereas the employees' actions are considered as employee green behavior (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 87).

Efforts to engage employees might not seem directly linked to the company's main sustainability goals and could be seen as a low-level feature (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 441). Individually, the initiatives that require employee engagement might not be critical for the overarching objectives. It could be interpreted as a low-level feature, which makes them dependent on high-level features (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 441). When viewed as a whole, these efforts motivate employees to pursue sustainability by cultivating a meaningful link between their daily tasks and the company's broader goals (Carton, 2018, p. 329). This highlights their importance in terms of the overarching objectives which are high-level features and thus refers to centrality. For example, incentives for using public transportation (low-level feature) may not be central to the company, but it becomes important if it supports the broader goal (high-level feature) of motivating employees towards sustainability and integrating it into daily operations (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 441).

5.3.3 Psychological distance affects dilemmas and trade-offs in companies

Behind the implemented sustainability initiatives in the 12 companies, there have been dilemmas and necessary trade-offs. As our findings revealed, there are three categories of dilemmas that companies in general meet; profitability versus sustainability, health versus taste preferences, and footprint

versus quality. The findings illustrate that profitability, taste preference and quality can be compared to being proximal concepts with an impact in the present. Our findings show that companies will cease to exist here and now if they do not earn money, customers will not buy products that taste bad and the quality of packaging can ruin products, for example through taste. These are all things that affect the business here and now. In contrast, sustainability, health and footprint are rather distanced concepts. Our findings show that “sustainability” is often seen as too broad as a word to grasp fully. Creating healthier choices requires gradual adjustments over several years, and developing packaging that reduces a company's footprint demands many hours of work.

The question is if psychological distance affects the dilemmas and the potential trade-offs? Our findings show that profitability is the focus, but there is also a gradual shift towards sustainability. However, the challenge lies in being part of an industry where some emissions are inevitable; without them, the industry would not survive, and as humans, we have a vital need for food and beverages. Taste preferences remains a priority and our findings illustrate that several of the companies produce products intended for tasty experiences which creates challenges to go all in for health, but there is a growing emphasis on healthier products. Quality is a key focus, but there is also increasing attention to the environmental footprint companies leave behind. Some of the companies are committed to transitioning to recycled and simpler packaging, which shows that they have been willing to do trade-offs in terms of reducing their footprint and prioritizing a distanced concept. According to Carton (2018), goals should be long-term and ambitious, so the ultimate aspiration will be a coincidence of sustainability, health and quality for companies. At the same time it must be meaningful for employees to see the link between daily tasks and the ultimate aspirations. This presents dilemmas where employees have the chance to work hands-on with sustainability trade-offs, such as deciding on tasteful experiences versus healthy products. This is part of the sensegiving efforts, linking their work to the ultimate aspirations.

Some previous studies state that a decreased psychological distance increases the concern and actions for climate change (Maiella et al., 2020, p. 1; Schill & Shaw, 2016, p. 357 Spence et al., 2012, p. 967; Wang et al., 2019, p. 9-10). Drawing on Carton (2018), fostering closeness can create significance, while

a lack of meaningfulness can increase psychological distance. This contradicts other studies which show that pro-environmental behavior will increase with an expanded distance (Agerstrom and Bjorklund, 2009, p. 267; Reczek et al., 2018, p. 97). In compliance with Carton (2018) and his four sensegiving actions, one can state that decomposing challenges into smaller areas, such as sustainability, by making it closer has its beneficial effects. By combining all the findings above and related to this, it can be challenging to draw parallels and reach an answer to the question above. A possibility is that there are individual differences where some people tend to chronically think high-level construals and thereby abstract which attracts them towards achieving abstract goals, while others tend to use more low-level construals (Ramirez et al., 2015, p. 1655). Accordingly, the dilemmas in our study may be influenced by the personal preferences of workers in each company, potentially affecting the trade-offs involved.

5.4 Comparing previous studies and the present study in terms of psychological distance

As the main part of this study, the focus has been on how companies make sustainability close, tangible and comprehensible for employees. The findings from our study highlights the importance of making sustainability close to the individuals rather than increasing the subjective experience of distance. An interesting interpretation is to observe other studies that have undertaken a view of CLT on similar subjects. Some studies state that a decreased psychological distance increased the likelihood of acting towards sustainability, such as showing concern and participation in pro-environmental actions (Schill & Shaw, 2016; Spence et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2019). This can be observed in the context of Soderberg et al. (2015) study, which confirms that psychological distance is widely generalizable (p. 543). This is in accordance with our study. Other studies illustrate that an increased subjective experience of psychological distance through interpreting information in abstract manners and emphasizing the future contributed to an elaborated concern for the environment by doing actions such as buying eco-friendly products (Reczek et al., 2018, p. 97) and recycling (Agerstrom & Bjorklund, 2009, p. 267). Another study supports this view by illustrating that consumers who typically think in broad terms were more likely to see environmental product features as significant when these features were framed as helping consumers achieve abstract goals, in contrast to those who tend to

focus on specifics (Ramirez et al., 2015, p. 1655). Carton (2018) highlighted that goals must be ambitious and long-term, and at the same time be meaningful. With this in mind, thinking broadly can benefit employees by helping them comprehend the company's ultimate aspiration, which is the most significant goal for companies.

These findings all together highlight that there are studies showcasing opposite findings in terms of proximity versus distance towards actions to environmental friendly behavior, which makes it an interesting case. There is a possibility that there are advantages and disadvantages with both a close and distanced subjective experience to objects affecting the psychological distance and that it depends on the context of its use. This highlights the importance for companies to assess the need to determine where to focus on the scale of psychological distance. A likelihood is that both too far and too close are not optimal distances, but a combination is the best in some cases supported by Sparkman and Macdonald (2021) study.

This thesis does not delve into the methodologies, implications, or limitations of other studies. It is possible that differences in insights between previous studies have contributed to varying results, which remain intriguing. Our study focuses on factors that minimize the subjective experience of psychological distance to issues encompassing sustainability, which can have contributed to our results. One potential explanation for these discrepancies could be the type of environmental action, like investing time versus money. The prioritization of time versus money may vary among individuals. For example, if money is considered more important, investing in eco-friendly products may be seen as requiring long-term benefits due to people's general aversion to loss (Stoknes, 2014, p. 163). People do not want to lose money. Thus, it stands to reason that some individuals may prefer not to perceive potential monetary losses but instead view eco-friendly choices as long-term investments of money. To appreciate the long-term benefits, and compare it to a psychological distant future (Trope & Liberman, 2010), can be affected by visions. Leaders can compensate for happenings in the distant future by presenting visions that are credible for employees (Carton & Lucas, 2018, p. 2124). An example could be envisioning great success for the company and a following raise of income for employees. Then, a reason to have faith in a distant future can potentially grow, and increase motivation of employees to keep

working aligned to distant goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 69).

However, a challenge arises when Construal Level Theory (CLT) suggests that abstraction increases alongside psychological distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440). More abstract constructs give higher level construals, which reduces details of events (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 441). An interpretation suggests that although consumers may intend to purchase and act in environmentally friendly ways, a significant psychological distance can lead to high levels of abstraction. This makes it challenging to anticipate future outcomes due to a lack of familiarity with the details. It is interpreted as contradicting human nature's tendency for loss aversion (Stoknes, 2014, p. 163) due to the greater uncertainty involved. The risk appears higher when specific details are omitted.

Conversely, high-level construal represents concepts beyond the present moment (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 448), offering insights and guidance on the most intelligent course of action over time at the present moment. In the context of climate change and sustainability, there is a possibility that people may prefer higher levels of construals because it is less susceptible to change compared to lower levels, particularly since these themes are often interpreted with increased psychological distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 441). Another potential reason, drawing on the findings from Ramirez et al. (2015), is that there is a chance that personality traits and individual differences are a contributing factor for emphasizing close versus far psychological distance, which means that personal preference might play a pivotal role.

6.0 Conclusion

This master thesis examined how companies in the industry of producing food and beverages work towards reducing psychological distance between their employees and sustainability, and how they create engagement for employees to be willing to contribute towards sustainability efforts. All together, the focus has been on how companies make sustainability close, tangible and comprehensible for employees. Construal-level Theory of Psychological Distance by Trope and Liberman (2010) have been used as inspiration and as a theory for analyzing the findings. 12 companies accepted

to participate, which cultivated valuable insights for this multiple case study and its research question. Consequently, this chapter seeks to address the following research question:

How can food and beverage companies bridge the psychological gap to sustainability for employees and inspire them to participate?

In conclusion, the findings revealed that there are four main ways companies are working towards reducing the distance. The first one emphasizes reducing the time span by tying events closer in time to now. Examples from the findings is rather talking about what the companies are doing the next year in terms of sustainability efforts than focusing on the goals for 2050. The second way of reducing distance is connecting physical explanations and objects to explanations because physical objects grab attention more easily than for example talking about amounts of emissions reduced. The third way companies are working is the awareness around abstract terminology and that it lacks impacts. The crucial aspect of involving and using explanations and comprehensible wordings for ensuring that all workers understand for example new requirements of reporting emissions or the divisions of emissions into scopes. The fourth and last way analyzed as a way for reducing distance to sustainability for employees is connecting incremental achievements to overarching objectives. Breaking down goals into manageable and actionable steps along the way are emphasized as important for creating motivation and thereby reducing the distance.

Throughout the analysis, it becomes evident that communication also is important for reducing the distance between employees and sustainability. First of all, communication can be used as a tool to generate hope, pride and progress through sharing success stories. This can increase motivation and willingness to contribute in sustainability efforts and increase pro-environmental behaviors and employee green behaviors. Second, there are several ways companies choose to share their success stories and other information regarding sustainability, through presentations to internal channels. The use of internal channels increases their span of reach within their firm, growing the hope of creating engagement and reducing the distance towards sustainability efforts.

Overall, these four mechanisms and communication creates the core to our thesis. The four ways of reducing distance can be compared to Carton (2018) sensegiving actions, which illustrate their empirical relevance. According to CLT

and relevant empirical studies using CLT, there seems to be differences in findings if a reduced or increased psychological distance leads to the wanted outcome. This highlights the possibility that differences in distance can be advantageous in different situations. In relation to our study, the focus has been on how companies reduce the distance between employees and sustainability, and reduction in distance was the primary focus when collecting data. This illuminates the reasons for our particular findings.

6.1 Further Research and Limitations

One limitation we have faced is the restricted capacity available for a master's thesis; we want to delve deeply into all topics, but unfortunately, our resources are limited. Additionally, since we have not conducted a research project before, we were unsure what to expect and how many resources it would require. Another early challenge was that some companies might not be available to meet with us, leading to responses being provided in written form. While we greatly appreciate their feedback, email communication unfortunately lacks body language and the ability to ask follow-up questions.

Our focus is on food and beverage producers, a relatively small industry. To maintain anonymity, we had to omit interesting aspects and statements. Companies shared many intriguing statements that we excluded to prevent competitors from identifying the sources. The same limitation applies to our lack of sharing the company's success stories, even though there were several. Another similar challenge is that some descriptions and statements were vague due to the fear of being exposed or recognized. This constraint also affected our use of secondary data, which we avoided to preserve anonymity. These factors highlight both the limitations of the industry and our own limitation of having only 12 interviewed companies, emphasizing the need to critically assess the results, which may not necessarily be transferable to other contexts and similar industries.

Therefore, in future research, it is important to have a broader and more representative sample to possibly gain transferable results. This might involve delving deeper into each company or interviewing more companies, potentially from different industries and sectors. Regarding our thesis, another crucial area of research could be focusing on external factors, since we decided to concentrate on internal drivers. Finally, it would be interesting to explore the positive and negative trade-offs resulting from sustainability efforts. Our data does not provide

sufficient insight into this, but it is certainly an aspect worth investigating further. From the limited information we have, it seems that the relevant customer groups might not be prepared for this change. Therefore, examining sustainability work from the customers' perspective could provide valuable insights. We have also explored the relevance of cognition and emotions, but we lack sufficient data to evaluate emotions and their impact on the change process.

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8.0 Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview guide

Categories	Questions
Introduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you introduce yourself, explain your role and responsibility in the company? 2. How many are responsible for sustainability, and how is responsibility distributed among those?
Sustainability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the sustainability objectives of the company you work for? 2. Are there any specific goals you find particularly challenging to accomplish? Have you already achieved any of them? 3. Have you made any investments in machinery or similar equipment? Can you give some concrete examples? 4. Could you walk us through a concrete sustainability project you have been involved in lately? 5. Do you have any success stories to share of implementing sustainability in the company? 6. In the examples we have discussed, how was sustainability made tangible, concrete, and relevant in the everyday lives of the company's employees?
Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How are sustainability initiatives communicated in your company? Could you provide us with a few examples?
Motivation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you build consensus about sustainability initiatives? 2. Do you take any steps to cultivate emotional involvement among staff? 3. In what ways do you make sustainability relevant to individuals in their everyday lives? 4. How do you inspire others to contribute to the company's sustainability objectives?
Reflection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think is the best way to communicate sustainability initiatives within your company to minimize the psychological distance that employees may experience? Can you provide some examples of this?

Appendix 2. Illustrations from thematic analysis using the Delve Tool

Step 1.

Sustainability strategy (6) >

Write a description or thoughts about this code

Reducing distance with internal driving forces: Kroners to kilograms (22)

Write a description or thoughts about this code

Communication (0) >

Write a description or thoughts about this code

Step 2.

Communication (0) v

Write a description or thoughts about this code

Collecting stories for hope, pride and progress (10)

Write a description or thoughts about this code

Conveying stories through many channels (8)

Write a description or thoughts about this code

Step 3.

Conveying stories through many channels (8)



Write a description or thoughts about this code

Edit

Sorted By Most Recent



Hvordan kommuniserer dere bærekrafts initiativer deres? Hvordan snakker dere med ansatte om det? Inkluderer dere ansatte?

Vi prøver det så godt vi kan. Vi har et kurs, og vi jobber mye på de ulike intranettene for å fortelle om hvordan vi jobber. Det vi gjør, er at vi prøver å få alle til å jobbe med det i sin jobb. Vi prøver alltid å løfte frem hver gang hva det er du kan gjøre. Vi er opptatt av at alle må ha sko om å være på seg selv, og ikke tenke på hva det er alle andre skal gjøre. Men hva kan du gjøre i din jobb? Så vi jobber ganske mye med det, men jeg føler at det alltid kan gjøres bedre.

Conveying stories through many channels



Vi bruker intranettene, vi har jo en egen sosial plattform hvor vi alltid informerer så mye som mulig. Og så er jeg og andre mye rundt omkring avdelingsmøter til alle de forskjellige kjedene, så vi prøver jo alt vi kan å informere. Eller ha dialog på hvor vi bruker tid med alt fra styre til alle avdelinger egentlig, om de relevante temaene.

Conveying stories through many channels

Appendix 3. Table 3: Summary of key findings

Subheadings	Summary	Statements
<i>Is sustainability integrated into the strategy?</i>	Most companies incorporate sustainability somewhat into their strategy, while a few have sustainability as their business model	“We have now implemented a new strategy, where we had to shift from a very vague, ambitious sustainability goal to focusing on managing our finances carefully to ensure we actually make a profit.” - Snacks Producer 1
<i>Employee green behavior</i>	Involving employees in sustainability work is important and goes hand in hand with management decisions	“The most important thing is to be involved and visible to the employees so they can come to me. They are the ones with all the good projects and improvements.” - Snacks Producer 2
<i>Sustainability initiatives divided into strategic steps by using “The Six Step model for Healthy Growth” by Stoknes (2021)</i>	Initiatives are implemented by the management, but a major component of these are dependent on employee motivation and involvement. The initiatives are designed to establish a sustainable business model	“Getting investments approved for major initiatives requires clear goals from the leadership. Additionally, those working on it need to be evaluated based on these goals” - Brand House 3
<i>The time dimension</i>	Sustainability goals cannot be talked about in terms of goals in 2050, but in terms of today and the following year	“Instead of talking a lot about what we are going to do in 2050, we are talking about what we are going to do this year.” - Brand House 2
<i>Physical size is more tangible</i>	Physical objects grabs attention easier and are more interesting to hear about than amounts of water reserved	“But when you measure things in kroner instead of kilos, it’s not as easy to see what is happening and why it’s happening. It is very complex.” - Snacks Producer 1
<i>Abstract terminology that lack impact</i>	The terminology used for sustainability is so advanced that training is needed to understand it	“We are not talking about net zero, nor are we discussing due diligence assessments according to the Transparency Act. We are talking about being in dialogue with the supplier because of a human rights violation that has been recognized as challenging in that particular industry.” - Brand House 2

<i>Connect overarching objectives with incremental achievements</i>	One way to create engagement is to set clear, tangible smaller goals and actions that align with the overarching goals, making them understandable for everyone	“It begins with the CEO's goals, which form the foundation of our strategy. This strategy is then cascaded down through the organization to ensure effective execution and delivery” - Snacks Producer 1
<i>Collecting stories for hope, pride and progress</i>	The importance of sharing success stories and giving people credit for their achievements	“I believe there are many stories to tell, and that we are doing a lot of good. We are ahead of the game compared to many other companies, and we have a lot of expertise in this.” - Brand house 1
<i>Conveying stories through many channels</i>	Utilizing internal communication tools, such as the intranet, to share information and stories, effectively reaching a wide audience despite physical distances.	“We primarily focus on communicating sustainability internally, with a strong emphasis on its personal relevance. How does it affect my daily life, and what can you do to help us reduce our emissions?” - Snacks Producer 2