



The “golden” voice of “green” employees: The effect of private environmental orientation on suggestions for improvement in firms’ economic value creation

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ABSTRACT

This study examines whether employees’ private environmental orientation matters for the economic performance of their firms. It argues that employees’ private environmental orientation affects not only their pro-environmental and pro-social behavior (PEPSB) in the workplace but also their inclination to make suggestions for improvements (i.e., their voice behavior). It also contends that their voice behavior is not limited to suggestions rooted in PEPSB but includes suggestions for other economically attractive improvements besides pro-environmental and pro-social improvements. This study further maintains that firms can support the transformation of employees’ private environmental orientation into voice behavior at work by influencing employees’ perception of the firm. Specifically, it posits that an employee’s private environmental orientation leads to more suggestions for economically attractive improvements at work, the more she or he perceives the company to emphasize sustainability. An analysis of 283 employees in the hospitality industry provides strong support for our theoretical account.

1. Introduction

Extreme climatic shifts and the social problems that increasing droughts, heat waves, and flood disasters entail have sparked a global interest in environmental and social sustainability (Abbass et al., 2022; Adams et al., 2016; Dodgson, 2021). Increasing numbers of political and societal stakeholders around the world are urging companies to improve their environmental and social performance, having identified business as a major contributor to environmental damage and a main force of social development (Palmié et al., 2021; Rupa & Saif, 2022). Coincidentally, society’s interest in sustainability is growing at a time when firms are facing increased competition (Mangla et al., 2022; Schallehn & Valogianni, 2022). Companies, therefore, need to find ways to become more sustainable without diminishing their economic competitiveness. Their employees assume a key role in managing this challenge. On the one hand, employees’ proactive suggestions for improvements allow

organizations to innovate and remain competitive in turbulent environments (Guzman & Espejo, 2019; Yusliza et al., 2020). On the other hand, employees are representatives of society. Therefore, the environmental awareness among employees is likely to rise as well, which could affect how employees think and behave in the workplace.

Many companies have responded to the demands of their market and non-market stakeholders for greater sustainability by broadening their understanding of performance from an economic focus to the “triple-bottom line” involving economic, social, and environmental performance (Bansal, 2005; Elkington, 2018; Tihanyi et al., 2014). This broader conceptualization of performance has raised the question of interdependencies among its economic and non-economic dimensions. Scholars and practitioners alike are keen to understand how a growing environmental consciousness and different pro-environmental behaviors affect the economic performance of firms. Some organizations, such as Marks & Spencer, Lush, and Ikea, argue that pursuing environmental

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goals benefits their economic prosperity because it helps them hire more qualified employees (The *Guardian*, 2017). Academic research corroborates this contention (Ardito et al., 2021). It further notes that environmental goals can raise revenues because environmentally oriented consumers may be willing to pay a higher price (Newton et al., 2015). Additionally, prior research has examined the effect of companies' overall environmental performance on their economic performance (e.g., Delmas & Montiel, 2009; Vasileiou et al., 2022). Thus, the existing academic literature heavily focuses on the effect of *companies'* environmental orientation on their economic performance.

In contrast, the economic implications of *employees'* environmental orientation have been less well explored (Leppan et al., 2010). Existing research that tackled these implications has so far focused on resource-conservation behaviors, such as printing on both sides of a piece of paper or saving electricity and water (see Yuriev et al. [2020] for a review). These resource-conservation behaviors are economically beneficial because they increase the *efficiency* of firm operations. What remains vastly underexplored is the association between employees' environmental orientation and behaviors that can increase the *effectiveness* of firms. A recent study started to investigate this association, finding that employees' environmental orientation can lead to more environmentally friendly innovations on the firm level (Wang et al., 2021). However, although pro-environmental innovations are promising means of reconciling a firm's environmental and economic ambitions (Palmié et al., 2019), pro-environmental refinements alone are probably not sufficient to secure a firm's economic competitiveness. Unfortunately, it remains unclear whether employees' environmental orientation can also stimulate innovation that goes beyond pro-environmental refinements (see Fig. 1).

Our study attempts to fill this crucial gap by answering the following bipartite research question: (a) *Does employees' environmental orientation affect their inclination to make economically attractive suggestions for improvement – to engage in economically attractive voice behavior?* (b) *If there is a positive relationship, can firms even strengthen it?* In response to part (a), we will assert that employees' private environmental orientation is positively related to their engagement in economically attractive voice behavior. We will then argue that the relationship between their

environmental orientation and their voice is partially but not fully mediated by their pro-environmental (and pro-social) behavior (PEPSB) at work. Hence, employees with a strong private environmental orientation make suggestions for economically attractive improvements that are not limited to improvements rooted in PEPSB but include suggestions for other economically attractive improvements. Finally, and in response to part (b) of our research question, our study will investigate how firms can leverage the potential of employees' environmental orientation and support the transformation of this orientation into economically attractive suggestions. To this end, our study examines the interaction between employees' environmental orientation and their firm's sustainability orientation.

Our study makes four key contributions to the academic literature and management practice. First, it indicates that employees with a strong environmental orientation make suggestions not only for pro-environmental improvements at work but also for other improvements that can be economically attractive to their firm. Second, our research illuminates the interdependence between employee-level sustainability and organizational "triple-bottom-line" performance. Third, this study advances the notion that employees' *private* attitudes toward the environment affect their behavior at work and thus matter to firms. Fourth, our paper contributes to behavioral consistency theory by illustrating that people may behave consistently across situations not only because of personal and situational factors but also because of an overlap in the cognitive foundations of multiple behaviors. Our study also addresses two limitations of previous behavioral consistency research. Specifically, it broadens the behaviors considered in this literature, and it applies the theory in a naturalistic rather than an experimental setting. Overall, our study pinpoints the economic advantages of hiring green employees and complementing their environmental orientation with consistent firm-level measures, rather than focusing on firm-level measures alone.

Effect on firms' economic performance through...	
... higher efficiency/ lower costs	...higher effectiveness/ higher revenues
Pro-environmental orientation of firms Orientation helps firms recruit, motivate and retain qualified personnel, and reduce expenditures associated with environmental costs. Exemplary studies include: • Ardito et al., 2021 • Rodrigue et al., 2013 • ...	Orientation helps firms achieve legitimacy, improve reputation, and meet customer expectations, making it possible to charge price premium. Exemplary studies include: • Sundin & Brown, 2017 • Úbeda-García et al., 2021 • ...
Pro-environmental orientation of employees Orientation makes employees adopt conservation behaviors (e.g., printing on both sides, recycling) that are associated with cost savings. Exemplary studies include (see review in Yuriev et al. [2020]): • Norton et al., 2015 • Yuriev et al., 2020 • ...	Orientation has been found to contribute to firms' pro-environmental innovation (Wang et al., 2021). A gap remains regarding the implications that orientation has for firms beyond the environmental sphere: • Article at hand

Fig. 1. Prior research on the influence of environmental orientation on firm performance.

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

2.1. Framework

This study seeks to examine the effect of employees' private environmental orientation on their voice behavior – that is, on the extent to which employees make economically attractive suggestions for improvements at work. Voice is an important proactive work behavior that has attracted wide academic attention. It is defined as an extra-role organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) that challenges the status quo with the goal of improving a situation (Morrison, 2011; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). It therefore includes activities such as speaking up about organizational problems and proposing improvements to standard operating procedures (Van Dyne et al., 1995; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Since voice is challenging the status quo, it may not always be well received by the persons affected (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Due to the inherent risk of undesirable social consequences, employees often choose to engage in voice only after analyzing potential benefits and costs (Dutton et al., 1997; Kish-Gephart et al., 2009; Milliken et al., 2003). Thus, voice is a discretionary behavior – individuals choose whether to engage in voice according to the perceived appropriateness of the moment.

To link employees' private environmental orientation to their voice behavior at work, this study builds on behavioral consistency theory, which holds that people are chiefly motivated by a desire to maintain consistency among their cognitions and behaviors (Christensen et al., 2015; Festinger, 1957). While behavioral consistency theory can be applied to different forms of consistency, a key form of consistency is “intra-individual consistency” (synonymously called “within-person consistency or “ipsative consistency”), which refers to the consistency between behaviors of a given individual across a range of situations (Fleeson & Nofle, 2008; Sherman et al., 2010). Behavioral consistency theory does not deny that individuals modify their behaviors in different situations, but it argues that individuals maintain a consistent behavioral profile – a consistent rank order of behavioral options in different situations (Fleeson & Nofle, 2008). In other words, if Ego exhibits behavior A in one situation and Alter exhibits behavior B in the same situation, then Ego is more likely than Alter to display some variation of behavior A in another situation. For behavioral consistency theory, employees' behavior at work is thus shaped by their individual characteristics as well as by situational factors. This view is shared by the interactionist perspective, which holds that individuals and situations mutually influence each other (Glaser et al., 2016; Shalley et al., 2009). In the interactionist perspective, human behavior is determined by individual characteristics, situational factors, and their interaction (Bandura, 1977; Schneider, 1982).

Following prior research, our study builds on behavioral consistency theory from an interactionist perspective (e.g., Jansen et al., 2013). An individual characteristic that is often emphasized in the interactionist perspective is proactive personality (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Fuller & Marler, 2009) because it has been shown to be a particularly important antecedent to proactive behavior (e.g., Bolino et al., 2010; Crant, 2000; Seibert et al., 2001). Proactive personality is defined as “the degree to which individuals have an active role orientation” (Erdogan & Bauer, 2005, p. 861). It is considered a compound personality trait (Hough, 2003) with recent meta-analytic evidence indicating that proactive personality is conceptually related to the Big Five personality traits – specifically to openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (Fuller et al., 2007; Fuller & Marler, 2009; Thomas et al., 2010). Openness to experience refers to the propensity to be imaginative, broad-minded, and curious. Extraversion denotes the propensity to be sociable, gregarious, and assertive. Conscientiousness signifies the propensity to be dependable and to strive for achievement, and emotional stability conveys the lack of a predisposition toward negative cognitions, intrusive thoughts, and emotional reactivity (Barlick & Mount, 1991; Smillie et al., 2006).

Personality traits, defined as “relatively stable, consistent, and enduring internal characteristic[s]” (VandenBos, 2007, p. 950), are powerful and ubiquitous sources of individual attitudes and behavior (Karbalaei et al., 2014). Attitudes can mediate the effect of personality traits on behavior so that attitudes represent proximal determinants, whereas traits denote distal determinants of behavior (e.g., Elias, 2009; Gallego & Oberski, 2012). This also applies to pro-environmental attitudes (Sparks et al., 2022; Tian et al., 2020), which mediate the relationship between personality traits, such as openness, and pro-environmental behavior (Markowitz et al., 2012). When individuals display behaviors rooted in certain attitudes and cognitions in their private life, behavioral consistency theory expects them to display related behaviors in their professional life. These arguments provide a strong foundation for examining the effect of employees' private environmental orientation – personal values and attitudes toward environmental sustainability (Spanjol et al., 2015) – on their voice behavior.

The situational factor considered in this study is employees' perception of the sustainability orientation of their organization. An organization's sustainability orientation refers to the extent to which the organization embraces environmental and social sustainability and conveys the values of and the commitment to environment protection and social justice (Banerjee, 2002; Croom et al., 2018; Glaser & Diele, 2004; Hussain et al., 2018). To ensure sustainable development, organizations need to establish sustainability strategies, create procedures to address regulatory and reporting issues, and develop policies to encourage pro-environmental and pro-social behavior (Banerjee, 2002; Norton et al., 2014). We chose to examine employees' perception of their firm's sustainability orientation rather than the firm's actual sustainability orientation because individuals' behavior depends not so much on the objective reality of a situation but on their subjective interpretation thereof (Kilduff et al., 2011; Thomas & Thomas, 1928). Hence, even though employees' perception may deviate from their firms' actual sustainability orientation, their perception is more closely linked to their behavior.

The third key element of the interactionist view in addition to personal and situational factors is the interplay between these factors (Glaser et al., 2016; Shalley et al., 2009). People associate strongly with organizations that they feel share their values and priorities (Chatman, 1989). Hence, an individual's behavior in an organization is influenced by the level of congruence between his or her values and the organization's values – the person–organization fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). We therefore include the interaction between employees' environmental orientation and their firm's sustainability orientation.

Additionally, our study examines employees' proactive PEPSB as a mediator between their environmental orientation and their voice behavior. PEPSB is proactive extra-role behavior that positively affects the natural environment and society (e.g., recycling, water or energy reduction, helping new hires, cultivating appreciation and thankfulness; Bissing-Olson et al., 2013; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011; Lange & Dewitte, 2019; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Including PEPSB as an intervening construct enables us to assess whether the effect of employees' environmental orientation on their voice behavior goes beyond suggestions for pro-environmental and pro-social improvements. Fig. 2 provides a summary of our theoretical account.

2.2. Hypotheses

H1: Relationship between private environmental orientation and PEPSB at work

Individuals need to contemplate the environmental consequences of action to engage in pro-environmental behavior (PEB). Having an open personality supports such contemplation because a high degree of openness is associated with cognitive capacity and being well-informed (Ackerman & Heggestad, 1997). Individuals with a higher degree of

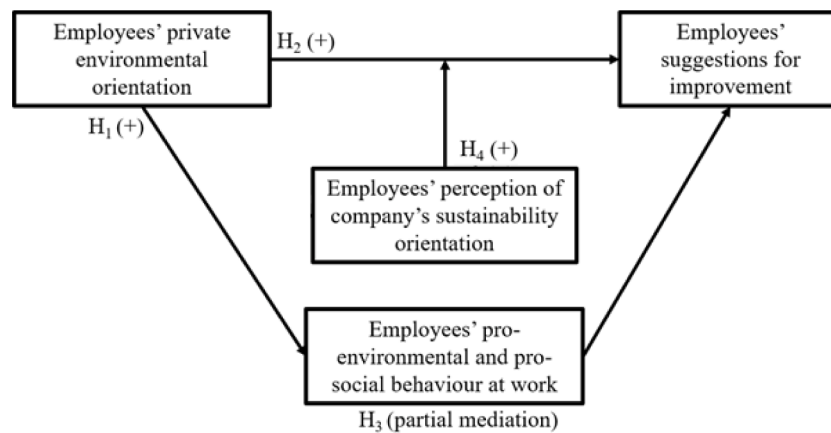


Fig. 2. Hypothesized model.

openness tend to be more aware of environmental consequences and, therefore, possess a higher level of environmental consciousness and orientation (Gifford & Nilsson, 2014; Markowitz et al., 2012). According to a recent *meta-analysis*, individuals' openness is strongly correlated with their engagement in PEB (Soutter et al., 2020). In line with a number of psychological theories and models that link attitudes to behavior (e.g., the theory of planned behavior [Ajzen, 1991] or the value-belief-norm model [Stern et al., 1999]), a positive association between individuals' pro-environmental attitudes and their PEB has been found in multiple studies (Bamberg & Möser, 2007; Hinds & Sparks, 2008; Kaiser et al., 1999).

Individuals' environmental orientation also reflects such personal characteristics as self-transcendence (individuals' proclivity to transcend selfish concerns to promote the welfare of others), people orientation, and moral development (Gifford & Nilsson, 2014). Since these characteristics also foster individuals' engagement in pro-social behavior (Fehr et al., 2017; Van Dyne et al., 1995), we propose that a pro-environmental orientation is not only associated with pro-environmental behavior but also with pro-social behavior.

Lastly, behavioral consistency theory suggests that people who behave a particular way in private are inclined to behave in a similar way at work (Green et al., 2019; Leikas et al., 2012). Employees' private environmental orientation can be strongly incorporated into their self-identity (Van der Werff et al., 2013). Since individuals usually desire to act in a self-determined and self-consistent way (De Groot & Steg, 2010), employees with a strong environmental orientation can be expected to act in accordance with this orientation at work. People are likely not only to enter situations that suit their own behavioral predilections but also to try to shape the situations they encounter in such a way that these situations conform to their preferences (Dalal et al., 2015). Hence,

Hypothesis 1: The greater the private environmental orientation of employees, the more they will engage in pro-environmental and pro-social behavior at work.

H2: Relationship between private environmental orientation and suggestions for improvement

In the interactionist perspective, proactive personality has been shown to be a particularly important antecedent to proactive behavior, such as voice (e.g., Bolino et al., 2010; Crant, 2000; Seibert et al., 2001; for a *meta-analysis* of the correlations between voice and the Big Five personality dimensions, see Chiaburu et al. [2011]). Individuals with a proactive personality are keen to see their ideas implemented and are, therefore, likely to engage in voice behavior to bring their ideas to fruition (e.g., Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Voice is also based on individuals' ability to think through their actions – which is reflected in conscientiousness (John & Srivastava, 1999). Thus, employees with a

high degree of conscientiousness and a strong environmental orientation seem likely to engage in voice behavior because they value prospective environmental benefits highly compared to potential personal costs. Furthermore, people with high levels of openness are more proactive overall (Fuller & Marler, 2009), engage in continuous learning (London & Smither, 1999), share knowledge (Cabrera et al., 2006), and are more mindful of their social environment (Krasman, 2010). Similarly, people high on extraversion are often characterized as highly social, active, and person-oriented (McCrae & Costa, 2008).

Since employees' private environmental orientation has been found to reflect proactiveness, openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (Fuller & Marler, 2009; Markowitz et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2010), employees with a strong environmental orientation may seek to learn continuously, develop ideas for overcoming challenges, and feel the urge to share their insights and ideas with their colleagues. Thus,

Hypothesis 2: The greater the private environmental orientation of employees, the more suggestions for improvements they make at work.

H3: Pro-environmental and pro-social behavior as mediator

We will now argue that the relationship between employees' private environmental orientation and their voice behavior is partially but not fully mediated by their engagement in PEPsB. In other words, we will reason that the suggestions made by employees with a strong environmental orientation are not limited to suggestions for pro-environmental and pro-social improvements, but they also involve suggestions for other improvements that provide competitive advantages and are economically attractive to firms.

When employees engage in PEPsB, they seek to make their workplace more environmentally sustainable and fairer (Bissing-Olson et al., 2013; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2011). Their effect on their company's environmental and social performance is typically greater when they not only act in a more environmentally friendly and pro-social fashion themselves but also make suggestions on how their colleagues, managers, and the company as a whole can act in a more environmentally friendly and socially just way. PEPsB is therefore likely to result in voice behavior that includes suggestions on how to reduce environmentally harmful activities (Temminck et al., 2015), how to improve the organization's environmental performance (Erdogan et al., 2015), and how to overcome problems based on cooperation (Van Dyne et al., 2003). However, we argue that suggestions made by employees with a strong environmental orientation go beyond suggestions rooted in PEPsB. Employees with a strong environmental orientation tend to be more willing to question the status quo, more alert to events happening around them, and more attentive to problems and concerns at work than colleagues who possess a weak environmental orientation (Ackerman & Heggstad, 1997; Dalal et al., 2015; Soutter et al., 2020). These

characteristics seem useful for producing suggestions for improvements in general and not just pro-environmental and pro-social improvements. In other words, considerable consistency exists between the cognitive and behavioral requirements of making suggestions for pro-environmental and pro-social improvements and the requirements of making suggestions for further economic improvements. Behavioral consistency theory argues that such consistency between two behaviors makes individuals likely to display both behaviors (Funder & Colvin, 1991; Sherman et al., 2010). Hence, we expect PEPSB to be only one of the mechanisms by which employees' private environmental orientation affects their voice behavior. Thus,

Hypothesis 3: Employees' engagement in pro-environmental and pro-social behavior at work will only partially and not fully mediate the relationship between their private environmental orientation and their suggestions for improvement at work. In other words, employees' private environmental orientation has a significant effect on their suggestions for improvement at work over and above the effect of pro-environmental and pro-social behavior at work.

H4: Perception of their company's sustainability orientation as a moderator

The final hypothesis considers the impact of a company's sustainability orientation on the relationship between employees' private environmental orientation and their voice behavior to illuminate what firms can do to leverage the potential offered by employees' environmental orientation to a greater extent. Behavioral consistency theory indicates that individuals will display focal behaviors more frequently, the more situational cues are clear and consistent with their personal predilections (Funder & Colvin, 1991; Green et al., 2019). Therefore, we expect that organizations can generate more voice behavior from their "green" employees by clarifying their own pro-environmental posture to these employees.

While the implications of companies' sustainability orientation on their employees' voice behavior have not been studied so far, research commonly considers employees' perception of their organization as belonging to the most important antecedents of their voice behavior (Chamberlin et al., 2017; Milliken et al., 2003; Morrison, 2014). Moreover, research on OCBs beyond voice indicates that employees display more OCBs when their values are congruent with their company's values, whereas incongruencies can suppress OCBs (Green et al., 2019; Hoffman & Woehr, 2006; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Accordingly, individuals seem more likely to speak up when they believe that their personal position is welcome and supported (Kim et al., 2020). Such enforcing effects of congruencies and suppressing effects of incongruencies can be expected to hold for environmental values given that conflicts between the environmental values of employees and their organization have been found to be a source of tension (Melville, 2010). Thus,

Hypothesis 4: The more a company appears sustainable in the perception of employees, the more the private environmental orientation of these employees is associated with suggestions for improvements at work. In other words, there is a positive interaction effect between employees' perception of the company's sustainability orientation and their inclination to make suggestions for improvements.

3. Data and measurement

3.1. Sampling frame and implementation

Our study focused on the hospitality industry to examine the association between employees' private environmental orientation, their perception of the organization's sustainability orientation, their PEPSB, and their voice for three reasons. First, this industry is labor intensive (Ma & Qu, 2011). Employees are a critical source of success in this industry (Guillet & Mattila, 2010) because their attitudes and behavior

influence the customer experience and, consequently, the performance of the organization (Brown & Lam, 2008; Heskett et al., 2008). Second, due to its labor intensity, its challenging working conditions, and its highly interactive nature, the hospitality industry can bring social issues and relationships to the fore (Lashley et al., 2007). Third, hospitality operations can have a significant environmental impact that may negatively contribute to environmental degradation and greenhouse gas emissions (Hunter & Shaw, 2007). Thus, the hospitality industry offers ample opportunity for employee initiatives with respect to environmental improvements and beyond (Hunter & Shaw, 2007; Ma & Qu, 2011). Furthermore, we chose to analyze hospitality in Switzerland because this country is characterized by a service-oriented economy and a relatively wealthy population with high social awareness and growing environmental consciousness (e.g., increased recycling behavior), implying a willingness to pay premium for services from organizations with a strong sustainability orientation (Crédit Suisse, 2020; Federal Council, 2018; Freitag, 2003). Therefore, we undertook our study at a large Swiss hospitality group.

Following the prior research into voice (e.g. Kakkar et al., 2016; Liang et al., 2012), we used a survey design to collect primary data from the group's employees. Validated academic procedures of questionnaire design informed the production of a fully standardized questionnaire (Dillman, 2011). Before the questionnaire was implemented, it was subjected to a pre-test with six employees of the focal firm. The pre-test led to adjustments in wording, additions in the form of introductory texts and memory aids, adjustments to questionnaire design, and a reduction in the number of items.

The final questionnaire was distributed to 610 employees working in all departments except "finance and controlling". We did not include employees from the "finance and controlling" department because their socialization and role perceptions render them likely to ground suggestions more in formal calculations and economic rules than in private orientations (Ferraro et al., 2005; Morrison, 2014). Among the 610 employees of the other departments were employees of the group's headquarters who could answer the questionnaire online as well as employees of more than a dozen of the firm's sites who could complete a paper version of the questionnaire. We chose to implement a paper version alongside the online questionnaire to allow employees without online access (e.g., those in the service area or the kitchen) to take part in the survey. To increase the response rate, the questionnaire was accompanied by a letter that communicated top management's endorsement of the survey. Respondents were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Finally, they could enter a raffle for several different prizes upon completing the questionnaire. Reminder e-mails/letters were sent about a week after the initial mailing. We received 283 completed questionnaires, yielding a favorable response rate of 46.4 %. Comparing the sample to the focal company in terms of the share of female employees (59.7 % vs 61.6 %) and the age distribution (with most respondents being between 36 and 45 years old, while the average age in the firm is 39.8 years) indicates that the sample is representative of the firm as a whole.

3.2. Single respondent and common method bias (CMB)

Following the recommendations of Chang, van Witteloostuijn, and Eden (2010) and Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2012), we employed multiple procedural and statistical approaches to rule out CMB at the design and evaluation stages of our survey. Procedural remedies such as adopting established instruments to measure our constructs, using a counterbalanced question order, and ensuring the respondents of confidentiality and anonymity minimized the potential for CMB ex ante. In terms of statistical remedies, Podsakoff et al. (2012) recommend using the common method factor technique to control for measurement error. Following this recommendation, we entered our main variables of interest (employees' private environmental orientation, their perception of the organization's sustainability orientation,

their PEPSB, and their voice behavior) into a structural equation model and added a common method factor to this model. Adding such a CMB factor does not significantly alter the paths between our variables, indicating that CMB is unlikely to bias our results substantially.

3.3. Measurements

All our measures except some control variables are based on multi-item, seven-point Likert scales. The scales are anchored at “Strongly disagree.” (1) and “Strongly agree.” (7). We calculated a composite score for each multi-item measure by adding its individual item scores and subsequently dividing the sum by the number of items in the measure (Haefner et al., 2021; Reinholt et al., 2011). To ensure the reliability of our multi-item measures, we calculated Cronbach’s alpha for each of them (results reported below; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Convergent validity was verified by calculating overlap-corrected correlations between an item and the measure it pertains to (results available on request; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Finally, discriminant validity was examined by comparing the square root of the variance shared between the items and their measures (i.e., the average variance extracted) to the correlation coefficients among the measures (see Table 1 for results; Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Staples et al., 1999). Overall, these methods indicate that our measures are reliable and valid.

3.4. Dependent variable

Employees’ suggestions for improvement at work were measured by employees’ engagement in voice behavior. Based on meta-analytic comparisons, previous research indicates that other-reported measures of voice behavior possess little, if any, incremental value over self-reported measures (Ng et al., 2021) and that self-ratings “should not be summarily deemed methodologically deficient” and inferior because of concerns over CMB (Carpenter et al., 2014, p. 565). In line with the overwhelming majority of voice research and having ruled out CMB as described above, we used self-reports to measure voice behavior (cf. Ng & Feldman, 2012). We adopted items that cover suggestions for economically attractive improvements in general, rather than focusing on pro-environmental improvements only. Drawing on Maynes and Podsakoff (2014) and Withey and Cooper (1989), we asked each employee whether she or he (1) tells the line manager how the services offered by [the company] can be improved; (2) has helpful suggestions on how [the company] can improve quality; (3) and has helpful suggestions on how [the company] can cut costs (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.9237).

3.5. Independent variables

Employees’ private environmental orientation was measured as the employees’ personal position toward environmental issues and environmental protection. Drawing on Kuckertz and Wagner (2010), we asked each employee whether she or he (1) believes that environmental problems (e.g., global warming, scarcity, or resources) have an impact on her or his life; and (2) whether she or he is willing to personally do something for environmental protection (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.8113).

Employees’ perception of company’s sustainability orientation may vary from the actual sustainability orientation of the company but is more closely linked to employees’ behavior (Kilduff et al., 2011; Thomas & Thomas, 1928). Drawing on Turker (2009), we asked each employee whether she or he perceives (1) [the company] as caring about environmental protection (e.g., no waste of electricity, water, food, and paper); (2) [the company] as caring about fair working conditions, safety at work, and fair career opportunities; and (3) [the company] as aiming for sustainable growth and long-term success (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.8165).

3.6. Mediator

Employees’ pro-environmental and pro-social behavior at work measures PEPSB in the work context by modifying Frese et al.’s (1997) scale in accordance with Bissing-Olson et al. (2013). Thus, we asked each respondent whether she or he (1) does not waste any resources at work (e.g., electricity, water, food, and paper); (2) stands up for other work colleagues and tries to create a pleasant working atmosphere; and (3) does not cause unnecessary costs and acts in the interests of customers and guests (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.7946).

3.7. Control variables

We control for *employee gender, age, education* (asking for the highest level of education received, distinguishing between “university”, “apprenticeship or other”, and “none or obligatory school”), and *departmental affiliation* (kitchen, restaurant, office, other) as well as for employees’ *job motivation* with a three-item scale based on Hackman and Lawler (1971) and O’Reilly (1982) (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.7433).

4. Results

Table 1 provides correlations for all variables. We used Hayes’ PROCESS macro in SPSS to test our theoretical account (Hayes, 2022). Specifically, our mediation model with a moderated direct path between employees’ private environmental orientation and their voice behavior represents an instance of Hayes’ Model 5. We instructed the software to specify robust (Huber-White) standard errors to correct for potential heteroscedasticity. Table 2 reports the results.

All our hypotheses are supported. H1, which maintained a positive relationship between employees’ private environmental orientation and employees’ PEPSB at work, is tested in step 1 of the process and supported at $p < 0.001$. H2, which predicted a positive relationship between employees’ environmental orientation and their voice behavior, is tested in step 2 and supported at $p < 0.001$. H3, which maintained that employees’ engagement in PEPSB only partially and not fully mediates the relationship between their private environmental orientation and their voice behavior, is supported because both the indirect and direct effects of private environmental orientation on voice are significant and positive, indicating partial – or “complementary” – mediation (Zhao et al., 2010). Finally, H4, which posited a positive interaction effect of employees’ private environmental orientation and their perception of the firm’s sustainability orientation on their voice behavior, is tested in step 2 of the process and is supported at $p < 0.05$.

5. Discussion

5.1. Findings

The objective of this study was to explore the relationship between employees’ private environmental orientation and their inclination to make economically attractive suggestions for improvements at work. Building on behavioral consistency theory, we hypothesized that employees with a strong environmental orientation engage in voice behavior more extensively because making economically attractive suggestions for improvement at work and caring about environmental protection essentially involve similar cognitive processes. A personal involvement in environmental protection, in turn, can serve as an indicator that an employee is willing and able to engage in the cognitive processes required to make suggestions for economically attractive improvements at work. Our hypotheses receive empirical support from a sample of 283 employees in the Swiss hospitality industry. According to the empirical results, employees with a strong environmental orientation in their private life indeed tend to display voice behavior in their professional life to a greater extent, and the suggestions they make are not limited to pro-environmental (and pro-social) improvements but

Table 1
Correlations.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1 Employees' suggestions for improvement at work	0.899														
2 Employees' PEPSB at work	0.312***	0.784													
3 (Perception of company) X (Private orientation)	−0.048	−0.068	1												
4 Employees' private environmental orientation	0.355***	0.361***	−0.299***	0.838											
5 Employees' perception of company's sustainability orientation	0.281***	0.391***	−0.275***	0.365***	0.831										
6 Job motivation	0.421***	0.422***	−0.197***	0.227***	0.398***	0.752									
7 Gender	0.098†	−0.037	−0.039	−0.018	0.033	0.07	1								
8 Age	0.183**	0.101†	0.125*	0.168**	0.052	0.04	−0.103†	1							
9 Education: none or obligatory	−0.152**	0.072	0.079	0.075	0.145*	−0.134*	−0.117*	0.097	1						
10 Education: apprenticeship or other	0.029	0.091	−0.017	−0.007	−0.102†	0.145*	−0.013	0.001	−0.616***	1					
11 Education: university graduation	0.115*	−0.183**	−0.058	−0.065	−0.018	−0.045	0.133*	−0.097†	−0.233***	−0.623***	1				
12 Kitchen	−0.170**	0.05	0.021	0.063	0.021	−0.125*	0.216***	−0.098†	0.209***	−0.017	−0.187**	1			
13 Restaurant	0.023	0.097	0.05	−0.04	−0.026	0.045	−0.180**	0.190***	0.009	0.083	−0.111†	−0.437***	1		
14 Office	0.145*	−0.221***	−0.055	−0.067	−0.009	0.011	0.004	−0.124*	−0.202***	−0.102†	0.326***	−0.305***	−0.377***	1	
15 Other job	0.013	0.056	−0.027	0.048	0.019	0.076	−0.029	0.007	−0.037	0.024	0.006	−0.279***	−0.344***	−0.241***	1

Notes to Table 1:

1. The bold diagonal elements are the square root of the variance shared between the items and their scales (i.e., the average variance extracted). Off diagonal elements are the correlations between the constructs. For discriminant validity, the diagonal elements should be larger than any other corresponding row or column entry (Staples et al., 1999).

2. † $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2Results of PROCESS macro for *Employees' PEPSB* (mediator) and *Employees' Suggestions* (outcome).

	Step 1	Step 2
	Endogenous variable: Employees' pro- environmental and pro- social behavior at work	Endogenous variable: Employees' suggestions for improvement at work
Employees' pro- environmental and pro- social behavior at work (Perception of company) X (Private orientation)		0.250* (0.119)
Employees' private environmental orientation	0.174*** (0.043)	0.125* (0.053)
Employees' perception of company's sustainability orientation		0.345*** (0.077)
Job motivation		0.099 (0.103)
Gender	0.327*** (0.056)	0.444*** (0.106)
Age	−0.065 (0.073)	0.288* (0.130)
Education: none or obligatory	0.004 (0.039)	0.158* (0.065)
Education: apprenticeship or other	0.214 (0.139)	−0.672** (0.242)
Education: university graduation	0.137 (0.097)	−0.327* (0.136)
Kitchen	Omitted (Baseline for Education)	Omitted (Baseline for Education)
Restaurant	0.057 (0.107)	−0.232 (0.216)
Office	0.046 (0.093)	0.099 (0.214)
Other job	−0.271** (0.106)	0.512** (0.201)
Constant	Omitted (Baseline for Department)	Omitted (Baseline for Department)
R ²	0.431*** (0.364)	0.364 (0.867)
F statistic (d. f.)	0.307	0.357
Number of observations	15.225*** (9, 273)	17.517*** (12, 270)
	283	283

Notes to Table 2:

1. Estimated standard errors are heteroscedasticity consistent (robust).

2. † $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

include other, economically attractive improvements. These findings imply that “green” employees can increase both the efficiency and the effectiveness of a firm. Suggestions for pro-environmental improvements may be economically attractive because they can improve the firm's efficiency by reducing waste. However, we find that “green” employees also make economically attractive suggestions that go beyond environmentally friendly resource conservation, implying a potential for higher effectiveness.

Moreover, we adopt an interactionist perspective on behavioral consistency theory (e.g., Green et al., 2019; Jansen et al., 2013) and further hypothesize that firms can stimulate the transformation of employees' private environmental orientation into voice behavior by creating a favorable situation at work. Specifically, we propose that employees with a strong environmental orientation will engage in voice behavior more extensively when they perceive their company to possess a strong environmental orientation itself. It should be noted, however, that implementing an environmental orientation in the firm is only one step that top managers must take to create such a favorable situation. Different employees of a firm tend to assess the environmental orientation of their company very differently. Managers must therefore actively make their employees aware of the firm's environmental ambitions. In any case, our hypothesis that employees with a strong environmental orientation will suggest the more economically attractive improvements the more they perceive their company to possess a strong environmental orientation is also supported. These findings advance the academic literature and provide theory-based and evidence-based insights to management practice.

5.2. Implications for the academic literature

Our paper makes four important contributions to the literature. First, our findings indicate a connection between employees' private environmental orientation and suggestions for diverse attractive improvements. So far, previous research has shown connections from environmental beliefs, attitudes, and values to pro-environmental behavior (Boiral et al., 2015; Lülfs & Hahn, 2013; Raineri & Paillé, 2016; Ramus & Killmer, 2007). In contrast to these prior efforts, our study indicates that the effect of employees' private environmental orientation goes beyond the environmental sphere and that “green” employees tend to make more suggestions for additional “non-green” but economically attractive improvements than their “non-green” colleagues. So far, interrelationships among the three pillars of the triple-bottom line (Elkington, 1994, 2018; Schoolman et al., 2012) have mainly been documented on a macro level, such as the relationship between a firm's environmental performance and its economic performance (Delmas & Montiel, 2009; Moldan et al., 2012; Porter & Van der Linde, 1995). In contrast, previous research has paid less attention to the question of whether the three pillars are intertwined in the minds and actions of employees (Angus-Leppan et al., 2010). Our study contributes to an understanding of the link between the environmental and non-environmental spheres on the micro level in finding that individuals' environmental orientation translates into suggestions for economically attractive improvements.

Second, this study advances our knowledge on the connection between micro-level and macro-level sustainability. Previous research dealing with this connection (e.g., Carmeli et al., 2017; Lamm et al., 2015) has for the most part examined the influence of sustainability-related concepts at the organizational level (e.g., firms' sustainability orientation) on sustainability-related concepts at the individual level (e.g., employees' PEB at work). In contrast, few studies have hitherto addressed the influence of sustainability-related concepts at the individual level on those at the organizational level (for notable exceptions, see Chen et al. [2015] and Del Brío et al. [2007]). Our study improves understanding of how employees' environmental orientation can contribute to the sustainability of the firm – employees with a strong environmental orientation make more suggestions to potentially improve their firm's environmental and economic performance. Relatedly, several scholars have called for additional research on how employees translate environmental initiatives into enhanced firm performance (Hansen et al., 2011; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Pivato et al., 2008). If we assume that environmental initiatives strengthen employees' perception of how environmentally oriented their firm is, then our findings suggest one mechanism by which environmental initiatives can lead to improved firm performance – environmental initiatives can indirectly stimulate economically attractive employee suggestions.

Third, this study represents an initial step in investigating the relationship between personal attitudes, on the one hand, and workplace behavior, on the other. While research in environmental psychology traditionally adopts a predominantly non-work perspective, research in environmental management is by tradition predominantly concerned with the work context (Russell & Griffiths, 2008). However, employees may bring attitudes and values from their personal lives – such as their environmental orientation – to their workplace, where their private attitudes can substantially influence their interpretation of organizational situations and decisions (Bissing-Olsen et al., 2013; Pratt and Dutton, 2000). Indicating that employees' private environmental orientation is associated with suggestions for economically attractive improvements at work, our study corroborates the relevance of employees' personal values, attitudes, and behaviors for their workplace. Consequently, studies in environmental psychology can be relevant for management research as they provide unique insights into cognitive processes of behavior formation at work based on individual attributes unrelated to work. By integrating findings from environmental psychology into the

organizational context, our study highlights a promising area for future research that might bridge the fields of environmental psychology and management.

Finally, our study advances behavioral consistency theory in two important directions. For one thing, our study addresses some limitations of existing treatments of this theory. Prior empirical research on behavioral consistency was predominantly conducted in laboratories or in experimentally controlled and narrowly defined real-world situations. By design, these settings only allow for a limited variety of behavioral expressions (cf. Leikas et al., 2012). Scholars have, therefore, called for investigations of behavioral consistency in more naturalistic and diverse situations (e.g., Leikas et al., 2012; Sherman et al., 2010). Relatedly, the theory has mostly been used to examine very specific forms of behavior (“micro-level behaviors”, such as smiling or gesturing; Leikas et al., 2012), expressions of very specific psychological predispositions (e.g., fearfulness; Funder & Colvin, 1991), or the same kind of behavior across time (e.g., job performance; Green et al., 2019). Scholars identified a need to explore consistencies in and across broader and more varied classes of behaviors (cf. Lang & Goh, 2020; Leikas et al., 2012). Our study helps academia overcome these limitations. Taking an interest in environmental protection in one’s private life and making suggestions for improvement at work are distinct, discretionary, complex, and fluid behaviors (Francoeur et al., 2021; Klonek et al., *in press*). We can reveal consistencies among them.

For another thing, our study extends behavioral consistency theory concerning the factors driving behavioral consistency. Existing research usually combines personal attributes with situational features to explain behavioral consistencies (e.g., Green et al., 2019; Jansen et al., 2013; Sherman et al., 2010). Rather than focusing on similarities in nominal or perceived features of situations, we highlight similarities in the cognitive requirements of behaviors. Thus, the consistencies in having an environmental orientation and engaging in voice behavior that we observe can be explained by similarities in their cognitive underpinnings. Searching for overlap in the underlying cognitive processes will likely make it possible to detect many more consistencies across distinct behaviors that have remained unrecognized so far.

5.3. Implications for management practice

Our findings offer several important insights for management education and management practice. First, our study contributes to the calls for empirically grounded insights into how firms can increase PEB in their workforce (Norton et al., 2017; Robertson & Carleton, 2018). Our findings reveal that employees’ private environmental orientation can indeed be an indicator for PEPSB as well as voice behavior in the workplace. Hence, we propose that companies can foster PEB within their workforce by actively seeking employees with a pronounced private environmental orientation because they are more likely to make suggestions for both pro-environmental and economically attractive improvements at work. Hence, firms may pay attention to employees’ private environmental orientation in hiring and promotion processes. Selecting employees with a strong environmental orientation implies that the selected individuals are willing and able to engage in the cognitive processes that are required to make economically attractive suggestions for improvements. By selecting “green” employees instead of employees without a strong environmental orientation, companies may therefore have less need to invest in developing the necessary competencies for a pronounced voice behavior in their workforce. Moreover, “green” employees may not only be more able but also more willing to identify valuable opportunities for improvements, as they concern themselves with opportunities for improvements (in environmental regards) in their spare time.

Second, we encourage managers to improve their employees’ perception of the firm’s sustainability orientation. It should be noted that we observed substantial differences in employees’ perception of their firm’s sustainability orientation in a single corporate group. Such

differences in a single corporate group suggest that firms do not always succeed in conveying their sustainability orientation to all their employees equally well. Thus, our study suggests that managers should not only consider strengthening their company’s factual sustainability orientation but also improve the communication of their sustainable mission to their employees.

Third, our study indicates that employees’ environmental orientation stimulates economically attractive suggestions that go beyond efficiency improvements rooted in environmentally friendly resource conservation behavior. Hence, employees’ private environmental orientation matters for their firms’ economic performance given that these suggestions can become a source of competitive advantage. Consequently, our study suggests that even managers who are not interested in improving their firm’s environmental performance and exclusively aim to maximize profit might care about their employees’ environmental attitudes and values. These managers should know that employees’ private environmental orientation tends to be associated with employee characteristics that are often desirable from an economic perspective, such as proactiveness, openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (Fuller & Marler, 2009; Markowitz et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2010).

5.4. Limitations and paths for future research

Our study points to several promising avenues for further research. First, little is currently known about the relationships among the economic, environmental, and social dimensions in individuals’ attitudes and behaviors. Previous research has illustrated that the three dimensions are interdependent on the macro level, where environmental sustainability acts as a “pre-requisite for social sustainability” (Panda et al., 2020, p. 3). Firms’ environmental performance is also increasingly related to their economic performance as consumers’ growing concern about environmental degradation often allows businesses to turn their pro-environmental efforts into a competitive advantage (Bask et al., 2018; Panda et al., 2020). It would therefore be interesting to learn more about the relationships among the three dimensions on the micro level. By showing that employees’ environmental orientation is associated with pro-environmental and pro-social behavior and with economically attractive suggestions for improvement, our study takes a step in this direction, but many relationships among the three dimensions remain to be explored. Similarly, the growing popularity of the microfoundations movement (cf. Felin et al., 2015; Palmié et al., 2023) suggests that we need to know more about the relationships among the three dimensions across the micro and macro levels. Previous research has linked employees’ behavior related to one dimension (e.g., their pro-environmental behavior) to their firm’s performance in the same dimension (e.g., its environmental performance; Chen et al., 2015; Del Brío et al., 2007). Our study suggests that employee behavior in a particular dimension also affects firm performance in other dimensions. Since more and more scholars and practitioners consider all three dimensions to be important (Dodgson, 2021; Elkington, 2018), it would be interesting to learn more about the cross-level, cross-dimensional implications of various employee attributes and behaviors and about contextual factors that strengthen or weaken these cross-level, cross-dimensional implications.

Second, future research could also address the limitations of our study. For example, we tested our theoretical account with data from a single corporate group in the Swiss hospitality industry, even though the theoretical arguments are not specific to this context. To assess the generalizability of our findings, future research should replicate our study in different empirical settings. Moreover, this paper focuses on the extent to which employees make suggestions for economically attractive improvements. It does not examine how many of these suggestions are subsequently implemented or how much economic value they create. While it would certainly be interesting to obtain insights into these figures, previous research has established that the number of suggestions

made is typically an accurate proxy for the number of improvements that are actually implemented (Axtell et al., 2000; Guzman & Espejo, 2019). Nevertheless, we encourage scholars to study the effect of employees' environmental orientation on the monetary value of their suggestions.

Third, future research could complement our study by investigating the interaction of other individual and organizational factors that may affect employees' PEPSB and their suggestions for economically attractive improvements. In doing so, future research could identify additional levers that firms could use to stimulate their employees' PEPSB and voice (cf. Keupp et al., 2012). Our findings demonstrate that individuals' environmental orientation is a worthy subject of interest for management scholars. Much more research is necessary to fully grasp its economic potential and how that potential can be leveraged. Our study is just an initial step in this direction.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Maximilian Palmié: Writing – original draft, Project administration, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Stephanie Ruegger:** Writing – original draft, Visualization, Conceptualization. **Matthias Holzer:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Pejvak Oghazi:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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