Chapter 12

Organisational and Employee Symbolic Environmental Behaviours: An Integrated Multi-level Framework

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<a> 12.1 Introduction

A large body of research that has recently emerged in literature and practice shows that organisations do not substantially perform pro-environmental behaviours (PEB). Some organisations have also been exposed by others (e.g., external individuals or organisations) to engage in symbolic environmental-related activities (e.g., *greenwashing*) rather than true environmentalism. At the individual level, the symbolic motive is also the latest development in the environmental psychology literature. Even though both organisational and individual level research of PEB have recognised the existence of symbolism embedded in ecological activities, scholars have not yet examined how symbolic reasons for PEB can be classified and examined through an integrated multi-level perspective. The focus of this chapter is therefore to establish a multi-level framework in the sense of explaining symbolic PEB at both organisational and employee levels.

An example of corporate *greenwashing* behaviour is the Volkswagen (VW) emissions scandal in September 2015. Before the scandal, the company claimed that they had adopted a common-rail fuel injection system in their vehicles, which had better fuel atomisation, air/fuel ratio control and emissions control (Jääskeläinen and Khair 2015). The so-called low-emission VW vehicles allowed the company to obtain green car subsidies and tax exemptions in the USA. However, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found that VW cars were cheating emissions tests through a “defeat device”. The device was able to automatically adjust performance when tested and concealed the fact that the engine emitted nitrogen oxide pollutants up to 40 times above the USA pollution standards (Hotten 2015).

Greenwashing is a deliberate information management strategy in which firms can selectively reveal positive information about their environmental performance while hiding facts of less favourable activities (Lyon and Maxwell 2011). Yet this idea of naïve *greenwashing* is less applicable today with the pervasion of social media and smart technologies. This calls for a broader consideration of corporate greening, which is nowadays redirected from *greenwashing* to *symbolic corporate environmentalism* (Bowen 2014). Symbolic corporate environmentalism refers to “*the shared*

meanings and representations surrounding changes made by managers within firms that they describe as primarily for environmental reasons” (Bowen 2014: 31). As suggested by the symbolic corporate environmentalism construct, all organisational environmental behaviours contain both symbolic and material components (Forbes and Jermier 2012). For instance, building a green factory contains a material component of clean energy usage system and a symbolic component such as showcasing an image of taking environmental responsibility through certification.

Bowen (2014) further explained that a green practice might result in either symbolic or substantive performance or both. Symbolic performance refers to the extent to which behaviour is appreciated and generates positive social evaluations. Substantive performance represents the impact of organisational activities on the natural environment in terms of minimising ecological damage. *Greenwashing* is the most widely acknowledged type of organisational behaviour that is merely symbolic, but it does not account for substantially benefiting the environment. Thus, the term *symbolic environmentalism* is a wider concept, which includes *greenwashing* but also encompasses substantive performance; and is the focus of this chapter.

The phenomenon of symbolic environmentalism however is not merely restricted to corporations. Employees sometimes also engage in symbolic environmentalism in the workplace. Boiral (2007) uncovered the ceremonial aspect of employees’ ecological activities under the pressure of ISO 14001, which is one of the most famous environmental management systems among organisations. There are deviations of employees’ work behaviours from standard prescriptions proposed by ISO 14001, but these deviations are reduced as much as possible during auditing. *“Just like students who go over their notes before a final exam, the managers and employees consulted—sometimes for the first time—ISO 14001 documentation; they read the procedures, updated their knowledge, and attempted to ensure that the system would be in order at the time of the audit.”* (Boiral 2007: 138). In other words, green employee behaviours can also be superficial, improvised and symbolic in nature, rather than based on true environmentalism.

Thus, symbolic environmentalism can take place across two levels: the corporate/organisation level and the employee/individual level. The motives behind symbolic corporate environmentalism have been analysed in prior literature through conventional and critical perspectives (which are discussed later in this chapter). However, the reasons behind symbolic employee environmentalism have not been investigated much. Hence, the aim of this chapter is to explore this gap in the literature and uncover the drivers of and mechanisms underlying the symbolism of environmental activities across organisational and employee levels via an integrated multi-level framework. Multi-level frameworks help to specify relationships among theoretical constructs at different levels (Randel 2002) and can

benefit researchers and practitioners to advance their understanding of environmental symbolism by exploring the commonalities and differences across the two levels.

This chapter firstly defines pro-environmental behaviour at both organisational and employee levels. Secondly, the reasons why organisations and employees engage in pro-environmental behaviours are discussed based on theoretical foundations at each level. Thirdly, the chapter discusses the drivers of symbolic environmental behaviour at each level and presents an integrated multi-level framework of symbolic environmental behaviour. The framework summarises the drivers of environmental symbolism by organisations and employees. The chapter concludes with practical implications and areas for further research. By identifying the reasons why organisations and employees engage in environmental activities symbolically through an integrated perspective, this chapter opens a new perspective of examining the performance of green behaviours within different contexts. It also provides valuable insights for government, organisations, managers and employees to confront the symbolic component of their environmental behaviours as well as to reconsider, adjust or restructure interventions of pro-environmental behaviours. Eventually it helps to promote true environmentalism among organisations and employees in the long run.

<a> 12.2 Defining pro-environmental behaviour at both organisational and employee levels

Since the 1970s, there has been a rise in environmental behaviour studies with an emphasis on understanding human responses to environmental issues, as a way to advance environmental protection practice (Kazdin 2009). *Pro-environmental behaviour* (PEB) is defined as an action that intentionally seeks to minimise negative behavioural impacts on the natural and built world (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002; Steg et al. 2012; Stern 2000). In other words, PEB is a type of environmental behaviour that has a positive impact on “*the availability of materials or energy*” and can alter “*the structure and dynamics of ecosystems or the biosphere*” in a beneficial way (Stern 2000: 408).

PEB is also referred to as conservation behaviour (Macey and Brown 1983), responsible environmental behaviour (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002), ecological behaviour (Tilikidou and Delistavrou 2008), green behaviour (Norton et al. 2015), environmentally significant behaviour (Stern 2000), environmentally-friendly behaviour, environmentally sustainable behaviour, and responsible environmental behaviour (Osbaldeston and Schott 2012), among other terms. It is a multi-level construct that comprises individual/employee, organisational, institutional, and social-cultural levels, although scholars rarely examine more than one level at a time. In this chapter, we focus on two levels: organisational and individual/employee levels.

Corporate sustainability or corporate greening in the management literature is normally a general designation of PEB at the organisational level. Organisational PEB (O-PEB) is defined as firm

practices that aim to reduce negative environmental impacts. These practices are mostly devoted to obtaining environmental credibility, to cope with stakeholders' expectations of environmental accountability (Buysse and Verbeke 2003), and to adapt to the trend of competitions over environmental-related resources (Hart 1995). In management studies, examples of O-PEBs are the adoption of environmental management system (e.g. ISO 14001), the establishment of environmental policies, the formulation or adjustment of environmental strategy (reactive or proactive), the encouragement and implementation of environmental innovation (product-focused or process-focused), and the promotion of employees' initiatives and participations in environmental program, among others. Organisational activities are widely acknowledged as a source of environmental problems (Whiteman et al. 2013), which is why O-PEB has received significant attention in academic literature and popular press.

At the individual level, there are contextual differences between PEB in the household and in the workplace. For example, a major difference between the workplace and the household contexts is economic constraints: employees are less sensitive to electricity, water, and other spending in the workplace than individuals in their home. This chapter will focus on the workplace context, and employees' PEB, which is important to the success of organisational greening (Anderson and Bateman 2000; Boiral and Paillé 2012; Ones and Dilchert 2012b; Ramus and Killmer 2007). Employees' PEB (E-PEB) will be used as the term from here onwards to refer to individual level PEB at the workplace. E-PEB is defined as employees' measurable actions that are linked with environmental sustainability (Ones and Dilchert 2012a), and are intentional and fully under the control of employees (Mesmer-Magnus et al. 2012). Examples of E-PEBs are complying with organisational pro-environmental policies in the workplace, and engaging in green practices at the workplace such as recycling, water saving, energy saving, printing reduction and pro-environmental commuting behaviours (Manika et al. 2015), among others.

In the literature, E-PEB has been analysed based on two main research streams (Robertson and Barling 2015). One is established from the perspective of environmental management, which normally regards employee behaviours as part of environmental practices and organisational change process (Boiral 2009; Robertson and Barling 2015), while another stream is generated from the organisational psychology literature, which stresses individual-level and voluntary behaviour in the workplace on the strength of socio-psychological models (Boiral and Paillé 2012; Ones and Dilchert 2012a; Robertson and Barling 2015). This chapter will explain E-PEB mainly based on the second stream of research, because it examines the psychological and motivational aspect of employee green actions, paves the way for understanding the drivers of symbolic E-PEBs, as well as aims to identify common features shared with O-PEB literature.

Based on the discussion above, Table 12.1 summarises the definitions of the constructs: PEB, O-PEB and E-PEB. This chapter will contribute to understanding the drivers of O-PEB and E-PEB separately before merging them into the multi-level framework proposed in this chapter. The following section presents a summary of the theoretical foundations of PEB at each level.

Table 12.1: Definitions of PEB, O-PEB, and E-PEB constructs

Construct	Definition
<i>Pro-environmental behaviour (PEB)</i>	An action that intentionally seeks to minimise negative behavioural impacts on the natural and built world (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002; Steg et al. 2012; Stern 2000).
<i>Organisational pro-environmental behaviours (O-PEB)</i>	Firm practices that aim to reduce negative environmental impacts.
<i>Employee pro-environmental behaviours (E-PEB)</i>	Employees' measurable actions linked to environmental sustainability (Ones and Dilchert 2012a), which are intentional and fully under the control of employees (Mesmer-Magnus et al. 2012).

<a> 12.3 Drivers of organisational and employee pro-environmental behaviours

 12.3.1 Theoretical Foundations and Motives of O-PEB

The corporate greening literature is built on three theoretical streams: institutional theory, stakeholder theory and the resource-based view. In addition, environmental behaviour in the management literature is often embedded in studies of corporate social responsibility (CSR), as green behaviours can be part of corporation's socially responsible activities. This section summarises these theoretical foundations at the organisational level to explain the motives of O-PEB.

<c> Institutional theory and O-PEB

An institution, as described by Jepperson (1991: 149) is a “*socially constructed, routine-reproduced, program or rule systems*”. Institutions consist of cognitive, normative, and regulative pillars that are fundamental to the stability and meaningfulness of social actions (Scott 1995). Three pillars of the institutional environment are embodied in strategies and activities that organisations use to materialise meaningfulness, appropriateness and legitimacy.

Suchman (1995: 574) explains that “*legitimacy is a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.*” According to Scott (1995), the three pillars of institutions relate to different bases for legitimacy: the cognitive one emphasises sources of legitimacy from adopting a common framework of reference; the normative one stresses a moral base for legitimacy; and the regulative one focuses on the conformity to rules and legal requirements. Organisations can

acquire legitimacy from the institutional environment if their actions accord with regulatory, normative and cognitive standards. In addition, it is argued that organisational legitimacy and reputation are closely interrelated because legitimacy is an essential although not a sufficient condition to attain positive reputation (Doh et al. 2010; King and Whetten 2008).

Legitimate organisations are the kind that meet social expectations, therefore, are accepted, valued, and considered as right, appropriate, and good (Aldrich and Fiol 2007; Doh et al. 2010). Driven by the need for achieving legitimacy, institutional theory informs us why organisations act on their social responsibilities (including O-PEBs). When the external environment has institutionalised a normative demand for corporate social responsibility, companies are more likely to engage in socially responsible activities (Campbell 2007). Also, Galaskiewicz (1991) proposed that normative or cultural institutions offer incentives to motivate organisational social responsible behaviours.

<c> Stakeholder theory and O-PEB

Stakeholder theory is another widely applied theory to explain O-PEB. A “stakeholder” is defined as any individual or group who has an impact on the firm’s performance or who is influenced by the firm’s business objectives and activities (Freeman 2010). Scholars have made a distinction between primary and secondary stakeholders. Shareholders, employees, suppliers, customers, and public agencies are primary stakeholders as they have formal and direct relationships with the firm, while interest groups and the media are secondary stakeholders as they do not have formal associations with the organisation (Buysse and Verbeke 2003; Clarkson 1995).

Stakeholder theory suggests that corporations are expected to not only concentrate on shareholders’ value creation, but also expand their considerations of various interests of salient stakeholders, such as customer satisfaction, regulatory compliance, good corporate citizenship, and environmental responsibilities (Buysse and Verbeke 2003). This is because each interest group has its own “stake” to make an impact on a company’s ecological responsiveness. For instance, consumers may choose to purchase or not to purchase, boycott or even bring a lawsuit towards companies without good environmental records (García-de-Frutos et al. 2016). Competitors may try to lobby for stricter or weaker environmental regulations, or increase pressures for ecological responsiveness through environmental leadership and innovations. Investors may promote green management by investing/withholding or withdrawing investment by shareholder activism. Supply chain pressure, employment issues, government and activist group’s endorsement/criticism, local community supports/protests, media’s public opinion may arm-twist the firm’s environmental standing as well (Worthington 2013).

<c> Resource-based view and O-PEB

Unlike institutional and stakeholder theories, resource-based view (RBV) turns focus to the internal competence of firms. According to Grant (1991), a firm's competences/capabilities to utilise valuable and inimitable assets/resources bring competitive advantage and superior performance. Quoting Russo and Fouts (1997: 536), "*the resource-based view addresses the fit between what a firm has the ability to do and what it has the opportunity to do*". Besides, RBV literature classifies resources into two types: tangible and intangible. Tangible resources refer to capitals and physical resources like plants, equipment, and raw materials, whereas intangible resources include reputation, technology, culture, and human resources (Russo and Fouts 1997). It was argued that organisations, which endow valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources, can achieve competitive advantages over rivals (Barney 1991; Collis and Montgomery 1995; Grant 1991). Based on the RBV logic, Hart (1995) proposed an environmental win-win approach to competitive advantage generation, as social and environmental challenges can enhance the development of firm's intangible resources, which ultimately contribute to better performance.

<c> Drivers of O-PEB

The three theoretical foundations in the management literature are often associated with three main motives underlying O-PEBs. Institutional theory underlines the legitimization motive of O-PEB, which illustrates that organisations aim to achieve legitimacy via pro-environmental practices, and thus is identified as the first motive for O-PEB. Stakeholder theory suggests that organisations engage in PEBs to cope with stakeholder pressures, which is identified as the second motive for O-PEB. Lastly, the resource-based view focuses on competitiveness, which is the third reason identified for O-PEB. Even though these three theories can be viewed in isolation, scholars sometimes use theories jointly to explain the motivations of engaging in O-PEB. For instance, the merging of stakeholder theory with the resource-based view proposes that environmental accountability leads to a competitive advantage because it helps to maintain reciprocal relationships with various stakeholders (Surroca et al. 2010).

In addition to the aforementioned three O-PEB motives, Bansal and Roth's (2000) model of ecological responsiveness identified a fourth driver of engaging in O-PEB; that is ecological responsibility which acknowledges that decision-makers within organisations may truly care about the environment. Thus, in total four motives to explain why companies go "green" have been identified: namely, legitimization, stakeholder pressure, competitiveness, and ecological responsibility.

According to the legitimization motive, organisations aim to improve the appropriateness of their behaviours within an established set of regulations, norms, values, and/or beliefs (Bansal and Roth 2000; Suchman 1995; Worthington 2013). Failure to keep up with environmental regulations will embroil companies in lawsuits and cause potential losses. Therefore, O-PEBs occurred from this

consideration are normally due to passive compliance with external constraints. In other words, O-PEB is not a representation of proactive efforts, instead is a reactive defence for survival.

Stakeholder pressure is another strong force for corporate greening (Buysse and Verbeke 2003; Clarkson 1995; Worthington 2013), especially coming from primary stakeholders (e.g. shareholder, employees, customer, supplier) because of their importance, power, legitimacy, and leverage (Freeman 2010). For example, if shareholders are informed and alarmed by the company's unsatisfactory environmental performance, they can express their opposition to irresponsible behaviours via activism. In addition, organisations face pressures from internal stakeholders like employees, because employees have been known to blow the whistle when they cannot stand by the violation of environmental regulations (Dechant et al. 1994).

The competitiveness motive refers to the potential for environmental responsible behaviours to enhance long-term profitability (Bansal and Roth 2000; Dechant et al. 1994; Worthington 2013). This is consistent with the resource-based view, which believes that competitive positions can be strengthened through possession of ecologically related sources and capabilities (Bansal 2005; Hart 1995). Companies with market orientation usually see environmental issues as business opportunities and engage in a proactive environmental strategy (Chen et al. 2015). However, O-PEBs based on competitiveness have been criticised for being independent of ecological consequences because they target higher monetary returns (Bansal and Roth 2000), thus these behaviours may not be truly "green" in the sense of minimising environmental impacts and improving environmental performance.

Lastly, ecological responsibility is "a motivation that stems from the concern that a firm has for its social obligations and values" (Bansal and Roth 2000: 728). Ecological responsibility is different from other motives of O-PEB because it derives from genuine concerns of a firm for the environment and a desire for social good (Bansal and Roth 2000; Takala and Pallab 2000; Worthington 2013; Wulfson 2001). Hence, the ecological responsibility motive is the sole driver of pure corporate greening with a more substantive component; compared to other drivers of O-PEB based on firm-interests (Buchholz 1991).

<c> Symbolism and O-PEB

To sum up, the reasons why organisations perform O-PEB are because: they are under regulative and/or stakeholder pressures; they regard O-PEB as a method to gain competitive advantage; and/or sometimes they believe it is "the right thing to do". Corporate greening based on these motives contains both symbolic and substantive components, or can be purely symbolic in extreme cases (Bowen 2014). Evidence for the latter can be found in cases such as the VW emission scandal introduced in the beginning of the chapter and in academic studies that unmask the symbolic nature

underneath those seemingly green organisational actions (e.g. Chen and Chang 2013; Forbes and Jermier 2012; Vidovic and Khanna 2012).

Scholars have discussed the reasons behind the symbolic nature of O-PEB through the construct of *symbolic corporate environmentalism*, which is discussed in detail in the section 4 of this chapter. The motives of symbolic environmentalism at the organisational level are also extended to the employee level to propose a multi-level framework of symbolic environmental behaviour. However, before doing so, the motives of E-PEB need to be identified first based on a review of the E-PEB literature.

** 12.3.2 Theoretical Foundations and Motives of E-PEB**

In the management literature, the role of the employee tends to be downplayed in implementing CSR programs including sustainability initiatives in organisations (Aguinis and Glavas 2012; Lamm et al. 2015). However, employees are an important stakeholder group and their behaviours largely affect the achievement of corporate sustainability, therefore, should not be overlooked. As noted in the introduction of this chapter, E-PEB is distinguished from individual PEBs in the household due to situational differences including economic constraints, social pressures, and opportunities to behave differently (Hines et al. 1987).

Although individuals may act differently at work, Rothbard (2001) suggested an enrichment process between work role and household role, which implies a consistency of behavioural patterns across the two different contexts. One possible explanation is that people want to maintain a holistic lifestyle by seeing domestic and work selves as a continuum in respect to environmental attitudes and activities (Smith and O'Sullivan 2012). Support of this explanation can also be found through the view of cognitive dissonance reduction (Festinger 1957), which argues that people will try to reduce discomforts coming from the conflicts between their private and professional lives. So, if a person has a green lifestyle at home, to avoid cognitive dissonance, he/she is very likely to incorporate the green lifestyle into the workplace (Lamm et al. 2015). The environmental psychology literature also underscores this need for consistency in behaviour.

Employees' environmental actions can be explained by social psychological models that are mostly applied in the household context such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein 1980), Norm Activation model (Schwartz 1973), Value-Belief-Norm theory (Stern 2000), Theory of Interpersonal Behaviour (Triandis 1977), and Goal-framing theory (Lindenberg and Steg 2007), among others. Even though all these models and theories can be used to explain motivational mechanisms behind individual and employee PEB, they fail to consider or tend to downplay the symbolic feature of PEBs. Therefore, consistent with the goal of this chapter, only theories that can identify the drivers of E-PEB with a particular emphasis of symbolic aspect are reviewed here. The

following sub-sections will introduce three theoretical foundations of E-PEB as well as discuss drivers to E-PEB focused on the symbolic nature of these behaviours within the workplace. Thus, from here onwards the term *employee* will be used instead of *individual* to refer to these theories even though the theories were initially proposed for individuals rather than employees.

<c> Norms and E-PEB

In the environmental psychology literature, many studies have emphasised the influence of norms on PEBs via different viewpoints. In general, employees tend to perform PEBs because of their own personal standards (personal norms) and/or the need to comply with expectations of others (social norms). Multiple theories, such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Norm Activation Model, the Value-Belief-Norm Theory and the Goal-framing Theory, identify norms as an important antecedent to PEB. For instance, the theory of planned behaviour proposed that one of the antecedents of human action is subjective norms (Ajzen 1991). Employees are assumed to consider the degree of whether their ecological behaviours are normal, typical, average, and approved or disapproved by others. In other words, employees' environmental-related behaviours are subject to social norms in the workplace. Researchers have further distinguished two types of social norms: injunctive norms and descriptive norms. According to the theory of normative conduct (Cialdini et al. 1990, 1991), people behave in a certain way by evaluating the extent to which an action is approved or disapproved of (injunctive norms) and the extent to which an action is perceived as common (descriptive norms).

Another two related theories, the norm activation model and the value-belief-norm theory, regard behaviour, such as PEB, as an outcome of personal norms and therefore focus on the factors that influence the activation of personal norms. Personal norm is defined as the degree to which one feels morally obliged to perform a certain action (Schwartz 1973), and it reflects feelings of moral obligation to behave in an environmentally-friendly way (Steg et al. 2012).

Additionally, goal-framing theory developed by Lindenberg and Steg (2007) also highlights the effect of norms on goal-directed actions. This theory suggests that behaviours derive from multiple goals, and therefore this theory can be used to explain why employees engage in PEBs based on the impacts of different goal-frames. There are three distinctive goals that influence behaviour: the hedonic goal "*to feel better right now*," the gain goal "*to guard and improve one's resources*," and the normative goal "*to act appropriately*" (Lindenberg and Steg 2007: 119). When one of the goals becomes a focal goal, other goals become non-focal and secondary. Imagine an employee who wants to dispose of an empty bottle. He/she has a hedonic goal of throwing the bottle right away, a gain goal of saving time and effort to find a trash bin, and a normative goal of being civilised and environmentally-friendly. If the person chooses to find a trash bin and put the bottle in the appropriate recycling division, then the normative goal becomes a focal goal, and is called a normative goal-frame in that situation. Several

studies have confirmed that the normative goal-frame is a driver of PEB (Lindenberg and Steg 2007; Steg et al. 2014; Steg and Vlek 2009). To summarise, the normative motive plays an important role in urging PEB at the employee level, which spurs from the employee's own belief system and moral obligation to do the right thing, as well as others' expectations of doing something that is appropriate and commonly approved.

<c> Symbolism and E-PEB

According to the theory of the meaning of material possessions (Dittmar 1992), material goods can fulfil individual's needs not only through instrumental function but also symbolic and affective functions. In the same way, employee environmental activities can have symbolic function.

The current PEB literature shows that the symbolism of PEB in the household context involves two key aspects: self-identity and status. Self-identity represents the label individuals use to describe themselves. Environmental self-identity is defined as "the extent to which you see yourself as a type of person who acts environmentally-friendly" (Van der Werff et al. 2013a; Van der Werff et al. 2013b). Additionally, the concept of identity similarity implies that there is a consistency between the characteristics an individual attributes to himself or herself and the type of behaviour the individual will have (Mannetti et al. 2002; Steg et al. 2012). It is argued that identity similarity accounts for reasons of environmentally-friendly behaviour over and above other factors like attitude, perceived control and subjective norms (Mannetti et al. 2002). Therefore, it is assumed that environmental self-identity can inherently spur pro-environmental intentions through the way of maintaining self-consistent image, that is, use PEB to express the type of person the employee is in the workplace.

Another feature is that individuals can seek to show their social status via pro-environmental actions. According to Griskevicius et al. (2010), status motive increases individual's tendency to be more altruistic because such "altruism" signals one's ability and resources (e.g. time, money) to take self-sacrificing consequences (e.g. pay more money to buy green organic products comparing to industrialised merchandise). This in turn showcases one's wealth and social status. The study confirms that individuals are more likely to choose green products when the price is higher than non-green products and when they are shopping and consuming in public. It reflects a possibility that employees are likely to consume green products to display their social status within the workplace setting (a public occasion).

Moreover, social identity theory, though not applied in the PEB literature yet, can be used to elaborate on employees' symbolic green actions particularly within the organisational setting. The theory suggests that individuals are inclined to classify themselves and others into different social categories (Tajfel and Turner 1985). The social identity construct encompasses individuals' perception of

“*oneness with and belongingness to some human aggregate*” (Ashforth and Mael 1989: 21) and resembles the concept of group identification (Tolman 1943). Besides, social identification (i.e. social identity) is different from internalisation (i.e. self-identity or personal identity) (Hogg and Turner 1987). The former refers to the process of identifying the self with a social category, whereas the latter refers to the process of incorporating values, beliefs, and attitudes within the self. According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), an employee’s social identity can derive from the organisation, his or her work group, department, union, and age cohort, among others. The identification of the self within a particular group may create internalisation of group values and norms into the pool of personal values and norms. The adherence to and homogeneity with a group/social identity further engenders conformity to group norms (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Hogg and Turner 1987). Hence, employees within an organisation can identify themselves within a social category, and this self-stereotyping process will increase the likelihood of conformity to group norms and rules, such as being environmentally-friendly. Therefore, an employee’s social identity can also provoke symbolic PEB as this becomes part of the process of social/group identification. To sum up, the symbolism embedded in an employee’s green activities may reflect the employee’s self-identity, personal status, wealth, and social identity within the organisation.

<c> Work environment and E-PEB

From the perspective of environmental management within organisations, employees’ environmental-related activities are usually part of the organisation’s whole management process and are a result of organisational procedures and requirements. For example, employee ecological behaviours are supposedly directed by ISO 14001 guidelines. However, this is not always the case. There is a large quantity of research, which studies employees’ organisational citizenship towards the environment (e.g. Boiral 2009; Boiral and Paillé 2012; Lamm et al. 2015; Smith and O’Sullivan 2012; Temminck et al. 2015), defined as “*individual and discretionary social behaviours that are not explicitly recognised by the formal reward system and that contribute to a more effective environmental management by organisations*” (Boiral 2009: 223). For example, Boiral and Paillé (2012) identified three categories of these types of behaviours: eco-initiatives (i.e. employee-driven green initiatives), eco-civic engagement (i.e. contribution to and participation in the organisational environmental initiatives) and eco-helping (i.e. mutual assistance concerning environmental problems). This concept of employees’ organisational citizenship behaviour towards the environment underlines the volunteering and self-giving nature of employee green behaviours, when PEB is not required by the work environment and is not included in work procedures.

Thus, a dichotomy of E-PEB emerges: required E-PEB and voluntary E-PEB (Norton et al. 2015). The former describes E-PEBs that are mandatory and contribute to core business goals (i.e. task-related). This is particularly true in organisations with the adoption of an environmental

management system. The latter emphasises employee green initiatives that go beyond organisational expectations and requirements, which is similar to the concept of employees' organisational citizenship behaviour towards the environment. Therefore, employees' environmentally-friendly behaviours can be in-role, prescribed and mandatory behaviours or extra-role, discretionary and spontaneous actions. This dichotomy is important for identifying drivers of E-PEB, which is the focus of the next section.

<c> Drivers of E-PEB

Based on the aforementioned theoretical foundations of E-PEB, four main drivers of E-PEB can be identified: the normative motive, the symbolic motive, the job requirement motive, and the ecological responsibility motive. The Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Norm Activation Model, the Value-Belief-Norm Theory and the Goal-framing Theory relate to the normative motive behind E-PEB. It shows that employees engage in PEBs because they need to comply with external norms within their organisations or they feel morally obligated to perform pro-environmentally.

Environmental self-identity, social identity, and social status usually explain the symbolic motive to E-EPB. That is, employees perform PEB to deliver symbolic messages of the type of person they are, the social category they identify with, and their social status and wealth. Complying with job requirements is a common reason for engaging in E-PEB, within organisations that adopt an environmental management system or establish environmental policies and standards. These E-PEBs are compulsory for employees and restricted to external rules and work procedures. Finally, ecological responsibility is another source of E-PEB. Employees voluntarily initiate pro-environmental activities in the workplace simply because they feel the urge and responsibility to behave in an environmental way.

** 12.3.3 Discussion of drivers of O-PEB and E-PEB**

To conclude, so far this chapter has identified drivers of O-PEB and E-PEB based on prior theoretical grounding in the literature. In particular, organisations are motivated to engage in PEB due to legitimisation restrictions, need for competitiveness, stakeholder pressures, and ecological responsibility. Employees are motivated to engage in PEB due to normative and symbolic reasons, job requirements and ecological responsibility. At each level (i.e., organisation and employee levels), the drivers of PEB pave the way for understanding the motivations of symbolic PEB, which is the focus of next sub-section. For instance, the VW emission fraud introduced at the beginning of this chapter can be interpreted as a symbolic corporate practice to gain competitive advantage because the adoption of a greener engine would generate positive product image, expand the market and benefit the company with green subsidies. In that sense, the competitiveness motive to O-PEB helps to understand the reasons behind symbolic O-PEB. At the employee level, superficial employee green behaviours under the pressure of ISO 14001 can be attributed to job requirements, which serve as an

important reason for engaging in symbolic E-PEB. Hence, drivers of PEB are key to identifying drivers of symbolic PEB at each level.

Additionally, previous discussion in this chapter reflects certain features of PEB shared across two levels. For example, the legitimization motive to O-PEB is similar to the job requirement reason of E-PEB as environmental-related actions out of these two are both in essence driven by external restrictions. Besides, both organisations and employees can genuinely do good for the environment simply because they believe it is the right thing to do. However, organisations that genuinely care about the quality of environment intend to minimise the gap between their symbolic and substantive performance. The same applies to the employee level. Those who attempt to take ecological responsibilities will focus more on their actual impacts on the environment instead of ceremonial poses/stands/actions that create false impressions. Therefore, the ecological responsibility motive across both levels is not relevant to understand the drivers of symbolic environmental behaviours and thus is excluded in the discussions from here onwards. The commonalities and differences between motivations of PEB at two levels provide the possibility to bridge the different motives together, integrate and transform them into a multi-level framework, which is the core aim of this chapter. The following section will present how the construct of symbolic environmentalism in both organisational and employee levels is built up via the lens of a multi-level perspective.

<a> 12.4 Symbolic environmentalism: An integrated multi-level framework

** 12.4.1 Symbolic environmentalism and its drivers across organisational and employee levels**

Both organisational and employee PEB literatures have noted the existence of symbolism embedded in ecological activities. Table 12.2 provides examples of studies in current literature that contribute to the construct of symbolic environmental behaviour. In general, the symbolism of environmental-related activities can be defined as the representation of pro-environmental behaviours with symbols or the symbolic meanings attributed to eco-friendly objects and actions. These activities come under the banner of *symbolic environmentalism*. Nevertheless, there is an imbalance between theoretical development of symbolic PEB at the organisational and the employee levels. A large number of studies disclose the symbolic nature of organisational greenings focusing on symbolic corporate environmentalism (e.g. Boiral 2007; Bowen 2014; King et al. 2005), whereas similar studies focusing on the employee level are scant.

Table 12.2: Examples of studies on symbolic environmentalism across organisational and employee levels

	Study	Contribution to the construct of symbolic environmental behaviours (existence/motive/impact)
Organisational-level	Bansal and Roth (2000)	Motive
	Boiral (2007)	Existence/impact
	Bowen (2014)	Existence/motive/impact
	Buysse and Verbeke (2003)	Motive
	Hart (1995)	Motive/impact
	Russo and Fouts (1997)	Motive
	Scott (1995)	Motive
	Washington and Zajac (2005)	Motive
Employee-level	Boiral (2007)	Existence
	Griskevicius et al. (2010)	Motive/impact
	Lindenberg and Steg (2007)	Motive
	Mannetti et al. (2002)	Motive
	Noppers et al. (2014)	Motive
	Steg et al. (2012)	Motive
	Van der Werff et al. (2013a, b)	Motive

According to Bowen (2014), there are two theoretical traditions that explain motivations of symbolic corporate environmentalism. Firstly, the conventional view stresses the economic and social benefits of acquiring social reputation and legitimacy, which organisations can gain by engaging in symbolic corporate environmentalism. This perspective is consistent with the legitimization, stakeholder pressure and competitiveness drivers of O-PEB as reviewed earlier in this chapter, because an illusion of environmental responsibility-taking does bring reputational resources and social legitimacy.

Corporate practices portrayed as doing good for the environment are perceived as legitimate and appropriate, can serve as a method to reduce stakeholder pressures and improve the competitiveness of the firm in the marketplace. This ultimately leads to social and economic benefits for the enterprise.

In contrast, the critical view emphasises that organisations may symbolically engage in corporate environmentalism actions to signal their status and authority (Bowen 2014). For example, an organisation may engage in symbolic environmental actions to reflect the organisation's power in controlling environmental issues/threats and to symbolise its leadership in green practices and standards. High-status actors within the field can signal environmental responsiveness to exhibit or maintain their authority.

These two perspectives are fundamentally different explanations for why companies engage in symbolic green practices (Bowen 2014). Symbolic corporate environmentalism is rooted in information asymmetries problem within the conventional view, whereas it arises from control problem within the critical view. Also, the conventional view is based on the economics of signalling and reputation, whereas the critical view is based on the power relations within institutional fields. To

sum up, motives of symbolic corporate environmentalism partially overlap with drivers of O-PEB, but also include aspects of status and authority. This is important to note because the two perspectives give different insights and directions in terms of building a multi-level framework on drivers of symbolic PEB across employee and organisational levels.

On the other hand, the symbolism embedded in E-PEB has not been examined much in the workplace context even though researchers identify factors like self-identity, social identity, and social status in the household context (e.g. Griskevicius et al. 2010; Hogg and Turner 1987; Van Der Werff et al. 2013a). For instance, employees may use green gestures to indicate the “environmental-caring type of person” they are due to the enrichment process between work and household roles. Hence, limited theoretical developments of symbolism embedded in the household PEB lay the foundation for exploring symbolic environmentalism in the workplace context.

Based on the drivers identified in E-PEB literature, norms, symbolism of self-identity, social identity and social status, and job requirements can generate ceremonial green employee behaviours. To be more specific, social norms can motivate employees to perform environmental-friendly activities superficially if co-workers consider E-PEB appropriate and often engage in E-PEBs at the workplace. Sometimes employees are also forced to engage in pro-environmental activities due to their job requirements. In this case, green work practices could be adopted for symbolic purposes to comply with rules of the job (both external and internal). Also, symbolic meanings of self-identity, social identity and social status can be transmitted and received by others via green actions at work. For instance, frequent recycling leads to the impression of an environmental-caring type of person and also demonstrate belongingness to an environmental-caring group of members, while driving a high-tech emission-less vehicle (e.g. Tesla model S/model X) to work showcases the employee’s status and wealth.

Thus, to sum up, symbolic environmental practices at the organisational level can be attributed to legitimization, stakeholder pressure, competitiveness and status and authority motives, whereas symbolic environmental actions at the employee level are influenced by social norms, job requirements, self-identity, social identity and social status.

** 12.4.2 A multi-level framework of symbolic environmentalism and its drivers**

The aforementioned symbolic O-PEB and symbolic E-PEB drivers share some commonalities. These commonalities serve as the way to merge drivers across the two levels into a single multi-level framework. Based on these commonalities three motivations—appropriateness, competitiveness, and status, that operate at both organisational and employee levels are identified.

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Firstly, the legitimization motive at the organisational level and the motives of social norms and job requirements at the employee level, are very much alike in the sense that they show compliance with external constraints to pursue legitimacy, appropriateness and acceptance. These drivers are merged together under the label of “appropriateness” in this chapter’s proposed multi-level framework. The rationale for rephrasing legitimization as a motive is because of the situational differences at the individual level. Specifically, for employees, their organisational environment may or may not require them to behave in an environmentally-friendly way. Required behaviours are more connected to legitimization while voluntary ones are considered appropriate; while at the organisational level legitimization implies required PEBs. Thus, the term of appropriateness is more representative and comprehensive as it can cover both voluntary and required PEBs across levels.

Secondly, the symbolic self-identity and social identity motive at the employee level shares commonalities with stakeholder pressures and competitive motives at the organisational level. Symbolic green behaviours may increase the behavioural actor’s competitive power compared with their original state. These drivers are merged together under the label of “competitiveness” in this chapter’s proposed multi-level framework. Moreover, the competitiveness motivation not only covers aforementioned motives in the current literature but also proposes feasible direction for further theoretical expansions. To be specific, it includes two dimensions: gaining scarce resources and being differentiated from others. At the organisational level, environmental friendliness reduces stakeholder pressures and is regarded as an important source of competitiveness such as gaining positive corporate reputation and better human resources, as per Hart’s natural resource-based view (1995). Also, environmental friendliness can be seen as part of a brand’s identity, which differentiates the organisation from its competitors. Although there are no theoretical and empirical studies regarding to the relationship between environmental friendliness and competitiveness at individual level, employees can take advantage of symbolic PEBs through the two approaches at the organisational level (i.e. obtaining resources and differentiation). The competitiveness motivation with two dimensions serves as a more comprehensive and insightful description of motives that generate similar results in both levels.

Both, appropriateness and competitiveness motivations in the proposed multi-level framework are supported by the conventional perspective of corporate symbolic environmentalism and are extended across the employee level. However, the critical perspective should not be neglected. Therefore, the status and authority motive as per the critical view, supported by the status and wealth driver of symbolic employee PEB, is proposed to be the third motivation of symbolic environmental behaviours across levels. In the proposed framework, this is termed “status” motivation.

Figure 12.1 illustrates the proposed three motives of PEB across organisational and employee levels; and their roots from O-PEB and E-PEB symbolic drives literature as well as reflective perspectives on symbolic corporate environmentalism literature. There are three motivations proposed in the multi-level framework: appropriateness, competitiveness (with two dimensions of resources and differentiation) and status. Appropriateness is built on prior literature on the legitimization motive at the organisational level; and norms and job requirement motives at the employee level. Competitiveness is built on prior literature on stakeholder pressures and competitiveness motives at the organisational level; and self-identity and social identity motives at the employee level. Status is built on prior literature on status and authority motives at the organisational level; and status and wealth motives at the employee level. The following sub-sections will explain each motivation in detail.

--insert Figure 12.1 about here--

<c> **Appropriateness**

The appropriateness motivation represents the organisation's and employee's intention to signal conformity with taken-for-granted norms or external regulations via symbolic environmental behaviour. Organisations and employees perceive symbolic environmental behaviour as a way of adjusting, improving and symbolising the propriety of environmental behaviours.

Institutional theorists used the legitimization motive to reflect the organisation's need to acquire legitimacy by engaging in pro-environmental behaviours. Legitimate organisational activities are appropriate behaviours. Organisational legitimacy (or appropriateness) can be obtained in the means of symbolic environmental activities such as *greenwashing* if the nature of hypocrisy remains unquestioned. An example can be the superficial adoption of environmental management system like ISO 14001, which "demonstrates compliance with current and future statutory and regulatory requirements" (ISO 2015). Legitimacy, or appropriateness, is by all means a major reason for organisations engaging into symbolic ecological actions.

At the individual level, employees pursue the appropriateness of their own environmental behaviours in response to external rules or social norms (e.g. peer pressures) at the workplaces. On the one hand, employees may engage in PEB superficially as required by work to show conformity to external constraints. For instance, the line workers at a factory under ISO 14001 may only engage in waste recycling and sewage treatments when encountering an environmental audit. On the other hand, employees may engage in symbolic environmental behaviours to show conformity to social norms; either to illustrate to people what others do (descriptive social norms) or what is commonly approved or disapproved (injunctive social norms). In the workplace, if being environmentally-friendly is accepted as a part of the organisational culture, it is very likely for employees to superficially perform green actions because these are "approvable" and "appropriate". For instance, in order to fit in, an

employee may fake his/her attendance of or show interests in environmental protection activities in their social media pages simply because other co-workers have participated in this kind of activity.

Moreover, perceptions of appropriateness at the organisational and employee level interact with each other, based on bottom-up and top-down processes. That is, the relationship between organisational and employee appropriateness of PEB is bi-directional; one influences the other. Firstly, appropriateness at the organisational level is composed of employees' subjective judgements towards what is legitimate, but aggregated and objectified at the collective level (Bitektine and Haack 2015). Based on the bottom-up influential logic, organisational appropriateness can be affected by employees' perceptions of what is an appropriate O-PEB and in turn these perceptions can influence managerial decisions on O-PEBs. Secondly, an organisation's social norms are based on employee perceptions of work climate. Work climate is defined as the perceptions of formal organisational policies, the procedures that translate policies into tacit guidelines, the practices that are rewarded or punished, as well as what is typically observed in the workplace (Norton et al. 2015). Based on the top-down influential logic, what is perceived to be appropriate among employees can be influenced by managerial practices such as environmental management policies or rewards and punishment scheme. Therefore, the perceptions of appropriateness at organisational and employee levels interact with each other and are shaped by both parties.

<c> Competitiveness

The competitiveness motivation refers to the organisation's and employee's intention to obtain a competitive superiority among rivals via symbolic environmentally-friendly poses. There are two methods to achieve the goal: acquire resources and being differentiated from others. The former tells how organisations and employees acquire competitiveness from external resources (e.g. reputation). The latter demonstrates how organisations and employees improve competitiveness through internal characterisation (e.g. identity).

<c> Resources

Based on previous discussions, organisations may perform symbolic environmental behaviours to gain competitive power via acquiring scarce resource. For instance, enterprises can attain a positive reputation via seemingly green activities, and thus temporarily improve a firm's competitiveness through strengthening relationships with stakeholders such as government, shareholder, and supplier (Fombrun and Shanley 1990; Surroca et al. 2010). In some cases, reputation can also lead to political resources (e.g. government support or tax exemptions) and human resources (e.g., a good reputation attracts and reserves better employees - Turban and Greening, 1997) among others.

At the employee level, employees may engage in symbolic PEB to acquire, preserve or enhance resources like personal reputation, and ultimately improve their personal competitiveness among other employees. Engaging in prosocial behaviours especially pro-environmental actions results in positive personal reputations (Semmann et al. 2005). An employee with a prosocial reputation is usually regarded as a more responsible, trustworthy, cooperative and helpful group member (Griskevicius et al. 2010). These employees are also more desirable as friends, allies, and romantic partners (Cottrell et al. 2007). In addition, an employee may perform PEB symbolically to show his/her belongingness to a specific social category (i.e. social identity motive). It can be assumed that similarity, proximity, and shared values and norms in terms of the same group's identity can help the employee better manage interpersonal relationships with co-workers. Also, it is suggested that the identification of self within a social category can enhance self-esteem (Hogg and Turner 1985; Tajfel 1978). Hence, employees engaging in symbolic environmental behaviours can increase personal competitiveness because of a good reputation, a better interpersonal relationship with others as well as a strengthened self-confidence.

<c> Differentiation

Differentiation is a frequently applied marketing strategy that organisations use to promote a unique identity perceived by consumers (e.g. Dickson and Ginter 1987; Ghodeswar 2008; Smith 1956). Building a green corporate or brand image makes a firm differentiated from other competitors. Examples like the Body Shop, and Wholefoods are typical enterprises that establish a green brand image and emphasise the pro-environmental feature of their products. However, it is also possible for organisations to enhance green brand image only through symbolic actions such as claims of future reforestation, plans to decorate headquarters or offices with a “green” appearance. Thus, organisations can benefit from symbolic environmental behaviour since it helps to enhance the green brand image of the company identified by consumers.

At the individual level, employees can perform symbolic environmental behaviour to demonstrate a green self-identity perceived by others at work. As mentioned in a previous section of this chapter, performing symbolic PEBs is a way for individuals to convey to others who they are, or to whom they differ from. Employees could also engage in role-playing and fake a green identity via symbolic environmental behaviours to respond to identity threats at the personal, relational, or collective levels of identity in their organisational life in exchange for self-gains (Leavitt and Sluss 2015).

In short, organisations and employees can be motivated to gain competitive advantages via symbolic environmentally-friendly activities which lead to reputational resources and differentiated identities. Additionally, the two methods of achieving competitiveness reinforce each other. For example, a featured green identity as part of the green marketing campaign usually leads to a green reputation

and other beneficial resources from a strategic perspective (Chan et al. 2012). An enhanced green reputation will further consolidate the green identity of the behavioural actor perceived by others.

<c> Status

Lastly, the status motivation refers to the organisation's and employee's intention to signal or strengthen their positions in social ranks via symbolic environmentally-friendly actions. Status is defined as the "*socially constructed, inter-subjectively agreed-upon and accepted ordering or ranking of individuals, groups, organisations or activities in a social system*" (Washington and Zajac 2005: 284). Organisations and employees can particularly benefit from the social hierarchical system because higher status normally equals to privilege or prestige (Bowen 2014).

Organisational symbolic environmental actions are driven by status according to the critical perspective of corporate environmentalism. A typical example is the Matthew effect, which means that the public is more likely to pay attention to and overestimate the environmental performance of higher socially ranked than lower socially ranked companies even if they are doing the same thing (Merton 1968). Besides, organisations with higher social status are often encouraged and granted the power to define green standards and codes. Therefore, a company can use symbolic environmental behaviour to showcase or improve its social status within the industry in exchange of privileges and other economic benefits.

At the employee level, employees may also seek to showcase their social status via engaging in symbolic environmental behaviours, such as displaying environmental-related material possessions. This is supported by the fact that consumers "go green" to show wealth and status and that higher prices attributed to being green increase the likelihood of purchase among consumers compared to lower priced alternatives as discussed previously (Griskevicius et al. 2010). The same could be applied to the workplace context; that is what employees consume in front of others may embody a symbolic meaning. For instance, eating expensive organic foods or using high-tech eco-friendly products can showcase an employee's wealth and social status. This is an example of symbolic employee behaviour based on a status motive.

In conclusion, the multi-level framework proposed in this chapter identifies three motivations of symbolic environmental behaviour across organisational and employee levels: appropriateness, competitiveness (resource and differentiation), and status. Table 12.3 provides a summary of definitions and examples of the motives at each level according to the multi-level framework. Next, the implications of the framework and resulted insights for practice are discussed.

Table 12.3: A summary of the multi-level framework of symbolic environmentalism across organisational and employee levels

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	Definitions	Examples	
		<i>Organisational level:</i>	<i>Employee level:</i>
Appropriateness	The organisation's and employee's need to signal conformity to the taken-for-granted set of norms or external regulations via symbolic environmental behaviour.	A company superficially adopts an environmental management system like ISO 14001.	<u>Required</u> : the line workers at a factory under ISO 14001 only engage in waste recycling and sewage treatments when encountering an environmental audit. <u>Voluntary</u> : an employee fakes his/her attendance of or shows interests in environmental protection activities on their social media pages.
Competitiveness	The organisation's and employee's need to obtain a competitive superiority among rivals via symbolic environmental behaviour.		
	<i>Resources</i>	A company obtains a positive reputation because it claims their products are environmentally friendly. A positive reputation helps the company further acquire more political resources (e.g. subsidies, government supports) or human resources (e.g. high quality employees).	An employee engaging in symbolic environmental behaviour to have a positive personal reputation at the workplace.
	<i>Differentiation</i>	A company strengthens its green brand identity through symbolic actions such as claims of reforestation, plans to decorate headquarters or having offices with a "green" appearance.	An employee performing PEB to send a symbolic message to other employees of who he/she is, or whom he/she is different from.
Status	The organisation's and employee's need to signal or strengthen their positions in the social ranks via symbolic environmental behaviour.	A company uses symbolic environmental behaviour to express or reinforce its social status within the industry in exchange for privileges and other economic benefits.	An employee eats expensive organic foods or use high-tech eco-friendly products to showcase his/her wealth and status.

<a> 12.5 Practical Implications, Future Research Directions and Conclusions

The symbolic nature of environmental activities in both organisational and employee levels is not a surprising finding, in most cases, researchers have explored it within one specific context such as the organisational context (e.g. Boiral 2007) or the household context (e.g. Griskevicius et al. 2010). The analysis of symbolic environmental-related activities is usually restricted to certain groups of behavioural actors and overlooks the possibility of bridging the motivational mechanisms across different levels. This chapter is the first systematic analysis of the drivers of symbolic environmental activities via a multi-level perspective, which explores the commonalities and differences among different motivators of PEB and provides theoretical insights into the symbolic nature of environmental activities. A multi-level model also provides a parsimonious overview of common motives of symbolic environmental behaviours across levels.

This framework of symbolic environmentalism introduced identifies three main motivators. Firstly, organisations and employees engage in symbolic green activities to exhibit or improve the appropriateness of green behaviours. Secondly, organisations and employees perform symbolic environmental activities for competitiveness enhancement through two approaches: obtaining resources or differentiation. Lastly, symbolic environmental actions driven by status show the state of organisations and employees in a hierarchical system perceived by others. From a theoretical standpoint, the identification of three drivers clarify the connections among theoretical constructs in organisational and employee level and give future research directions in terms of exploring the commonalities and differences across the two levels.

From a practical standpoint, the multi-level framework proposed here, identifying the reasons why organisations and employees engage in symbolic environmental activities, provides valuable insights for government, organisations, managers and employees. Specifically, for regulators or supervisors of employees, this multi-level framework of symbolic environmentalism illustrates the challenge of monitoring and evaluating organisations' and employees' substantive environmental performance; given that organisational and employee environmental practices can be based on self-interests, can be superficial and symbolic in nature. Uncovering the motives of organisations' and employees' environmental behaviours is difficult and even if they are identified as symbolic in nature, the challenge still remains: how to motivate true green behaviours across organisation and employee levels; and how to reduce the symbolism within their PEBs and instead translate it into truly green behaviours.

The problem of encouraging true PEB or transforming symbolic PEB into true PEB is that the line between the two kinds is blurred. For example, as discovered in the literature, organisational green solutions contain both symbolic and substantive components. There is no such assurance that greening

practices will result in substantive performance only. Even an organisation wants to truly do good for the environment, it tells something to the public, or perceived as “telling a story” (e.g. as managing public relations or establishing a positive social image). Hence, the exhibition of symbolism is to some extents unavoidable for corporate greening practices. In terms of the employee level environmental-related activities, although those can be improvisational and superficial, motivating true PEB is less difficult to realise. One of the methods is to cultivate a habitual pattern of doing environmental-friendly actions arisen from those with symbolic purposes, that is to turn symbolic PEB to truly green PEB. Habits guide pro-environmental behaviours via an automated rather than an elaborate cognitive process (Steg and Vlek 2009). The formation of habits depends on extensive repetition of behaviours (Aarts et al. 1998), and once formed, future behaviours are generated outside the realm of cognitions (e.g. attitudes, subjective norms, intentions, and perceived control) and affect (Gregory and Leo 2003; Ouellette and Wood 1998). Thus, it is possible that employees are highly likely to form a habit of engaging in pro-environmental activities in the workplace after repeated symbolic green behaviours at first. Due to the enriching work-family interfaces (Rothbard 2001), employees are also likely to incorporate habitual green behavioural pattern into the household context and thus develop a holistic true green lifestyle in general.

The discussions above raise another question of whether symbolic PEBs should be advocated at all. Symbolic environmental activities can benefit the environment, even if originally this was not the intention of the organisation and/or employee. Symbolic gestures can also bring positive social and interpersonal gains. The superficial adoption of an environmental management system at least demonstrates the organisation’s intention to control corporate environmental damages, and therefore depicts a positive social orientation to the public. For instance, according to Christensen et al. (2013), aspirational CSR *talk* is inevitable to the articulation of corporate reality and ideals, as opposed to the traditional perspective of CSR communications being superficial, hypocritical and decoupled from material aspects of organisational practices. That is, talking about their CSR plans, values, and ideals can be seen as “*a transitional or preparatory stage towards a better organisation in which morally superior talk reflects virtuous behaviour*” (Christensen et al. 2013: 384). Another example is that even though employees can consume expensive green products at work to showcase their status and wealth, they also set an example of being environmental-harmless and may consequently influence other co-workers’ behavioural intentions to be greener. Thus, even though symbolic environmental activities are not true environmentalism they could lead to positive environmental improvements over time.

In addition, no matter an individual green behaviour itself is true or symbolic, the meanings emerged from interactions between behavioural actors and perceivers are symbolic as per the symbolic interactionism theory (Blumer 1969; Denzin 1992; Fine 1993; Mead 1934; Shott 1976; Stryker 1980).

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This theory is a micro-scale-focused theoretical perspective in sociology that presents how society is created and operated through repeated interactions among individuals (Carter and Fuller 2015). Central to the perspective is the idea of people using language and important symbols to communicate with others. According to Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism theory mainly proposed that (1) individuals behave based on the meanings objects have for them; (2) meanings are derived from interactions between individuals; (3) meanings are dynamic and changeable via interpretations during interactions with others. Therefore, to apply the view to previous discussions, both the green behavioural actor and perceivers of the green behaviour acquire symbolic meanings from the interactions between each other. For instance, the symbolic meaning of “recycling is an appropriate thing to do” can be assigned to the recycling behaviour via interactions between *me* and others (e.g. my supervisor say that what you did is right and rewardable). However, the symbolic interactionism theory is restricted to individual-level studies and has not yet considered collective interactions between a group of individuals with other groups, or between an organisation and other organisations etc.

Although the multi-level framework helps to specify relationships among theoretical constructs at different levels, it is not without limitations. The framework may overemphasise the commonalities and neglect the differences between the two levels. Future research could study the disparities and inconsistencies between drivers of symbolic PEB across the two levels. In addition, the framework is not empirically validated, and it should be evaluated in a practical setting. Especially, the most important step is to validate the extension of literature in the employee level since there are limited studies related to employee symbolic environmentalism. For instance, one way of testing symbolic environmental behaviours at employee level is to set up scoreboards at work, which record the performance of each employee’s environmental-related activities and accordingly give feedbacks to behavioural actors. A previous study of the efficacy of detailed private versus public information on conservation behaviours showed that public disclosed information of students’ energy consumption encourages electricity saving behaviours due to the activation of social norms and reputation (Delmas and Lessem 2014). In the same way, it could be assumed that employees are likely to perform symbolic PEB in the workplace if their footprints are being tracked and displayed in public. Moreover, although this framework identifies three major reasons behind symbolic environmental behaviours, it does not specify the differences among them in terms of the efficacy (significant vs. non-significant) or constancy (short-run vs. long-run) of influences on the behavioural actors. The effectiveness of motivational mechanism may differ among appropriateness, competitiveness and status motives. For instance, symbolic green practices might be largely motivated by the competitiveness motive whereas mildly encouraged by the status motive. Also, researchers could study the effectiveness of three motives through a longitudinal comparison. For example, the competitiveness motive may have a more long-lasting effect on the behavioural actor than the other two. Furthermore, although the

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framework clarifies the connections among theoretical constructs in organisational and employee levels, it underplays the dynamics between the two levels, future research could focus on the interactions between these levels (e.g. what is the impact of one level on the other). Hence, the framework should be theoretically extended in the future.

In conclusion, the multi-level framework of symbolic environmentalism fills in the research gap in the literature and opens the door of exploring the rhetorical and symbolic nature of environmental behaviours across different levels. It offers a new perspective of examining the motivational mechanism behind environmental symbolism, encourages thinking of how to see symbolic environmental activities in practice, and opens new opportunities for theoretical expansions in the future.

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Figure

Note: ⁺ labels motives of organisational symbolic environmental behaviours based on the conventional view; ⁺⁺ labels motives of organisational symbolic environmental behaviours based on the critical view. Arrows do not infer causal relationships but guide the development of the multi-level framework proposed in this paper.

Figure 12.1 A multi-level framework of symbolic environmentalism in organisational and employee levels and its roots