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Transforming Foodways: Sustainability Sensemaking Processes Among Finnish Food Companies

Abstract

Food companies are central actors in driving sustainability transformations at the interface of production and consumption. Still, only limited attention has been directed to how sustainability-related meanings are being created within various food industry organizations. In this article, we explore the characteristics of the sustainability sensemaking and -giving processes among food companies and analyze how these processes influence sustainability-related transformations of current foodways. Our analysis is based on qualitative data (transcripts and notes) from interviews with managers from 15 Finnish food companies. By using organizational sensemaking literature, we shed light on the companies' cultural talk and social meaning creations of sustainability. Our findings indicate that food companies' sustainability sensemaking is an intra- and inter-organizational, social process occurring between the individual and organizational spheres of the organizations. Food companies act as sensegivers, as they actively communicate with stakeholders to achieve the position of a knowledgeable sustainability forerunner. Sustainability has been normalized in the talk and action of food companies, but the discursive space offered by them is limited to weak sustainability perspectives. While socio-material transgressions of current foodways may emerge, we argue that a shift from communicating and commercializing sustainability to a focus on ecological material aspects and ecological sensemaking is essential for transforming foodways towards strong sustainability.

Keywords: sustainability; sustainable food systems; foodways; organizations; food companies; sensemaking; sensegiving

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Introduction

The global food system is a major force that contributes to exceeding known planetary boundaries (Steffen et al. 2015; Campbell et al. 2017), including climate change, biodiversity loss, and degradation of land and freshwater (Foley et al. 2011; Poore & Nemecek 2018). Furthermore, social challenges are increasing as food continues to be unevenly distributed, leading to food wastage and excess in certain parts of the world, and hunger and malnutrition in others (Willett et al. 2019; FAO, 2019). As the undesired ecological consequences of our current food system are becoming more evident and severe (e.g., IPCC 2019), understanding how to break away from unsustainable modes of food production and consumption is becoming increasingly important. Transitions towards sustainability requires modifying current foodways, including the social and cultural processes, rules, and meanings that are part of the food chain from the production and processing to the cooking and consumption of food (Peres 2017; Bortolotto & Ubertazzi 2018).

Food industry organizations are central actors in driving sustainability at the interface of food production and consumption. Food companies influence food supplies in stores by introducing new products, making assortment changes, promoting certain products, and marketing their brands. They have an impact on what we eat and how we perceive and talk about food, i.e., the food cultures of our societies. Food companies are indeed faced with increasing political pressure to take responsibility for various sustainability issues (IPES-Food 2017; European Commission 2020). Consequently, organizations in the food sector are strengthening their agency for food system sustainability and integrating various sustainability aspects into company operations, products, and brands (e.g., van der Heijden & Cramer 2017; Long, Looijen & Blok 2018; Cortese, Rainero & Cantino 2021).

Organizational perspectives to food system sustainability have mainly been provided by the field of supply chain and strategic management research, in which corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been linked to the food industry as an empirical context (e.g., Maloni & Brown 2006; Hartmann 2011; Gold & Heikkurinen 2013). While these studies are useful for understanding sustainability in corporate organizations, they are limited to management activities, strategic decision-making, and business outcomes in general (Luhmann & Theuvsen 2016). Sustainability is context dependent (e.g., Geels & Schot 2007; Dedeurwaerdere 2014), and the transformation of foodways requires a deeper understanding of contextual, socio-cultural aspects underlying daily food activities, including those of organizations. As Perey (2015) noted, sustainability is a contested concept, and adopting it in organizational practices continues to be problematic. Hence, it seems warranted to direct more atten-

tion to how sustainability-related meanings are being created within various food organizations.

Such attention is provided by the concept of organizational sensemaking (Weick 1995), which enables a focus shift from organizational outcomes to the social processes foregoing these outcomes (Mills, Thurlow & Mills 2010). Sensemaking is a theoretical framework for bringing to light how meaning is created and sustained within organizations through continuous cycles of making sense of and giving sense to cues in the organization's environment. Sensemaking typically occurs when organizations are faced with ambiguous issues, such as sustainability. Organizational sensemaking has been used to analyze sustainability in diverse business fields (e.g., Angus-Leppan, Benn & Young 2010; Onkila, Mäkelä, & Järvenpää 2018; van der Heijden, Cramer & Driessen 2012) and in non-profit organizations (Perey 2015). In the food sector, sustainability sensemaking has been studied in relation to food banks (Elmes, Mendoza-Abarca & Hersh 2016), organic food (Hilverda, Kuttschreuter & Giebels 2017), and restaurants (Ocampo, Marshall, Wellton & Jonsson 2021). A few case studies have been conducted within food companies, e.g., in the pig farming and meat industries (van der Heijden & Cramer 2017; Hübel 2022), but the sensemaking processes across a broader range of companies in the food industry have not yet been researched. With this article, we aim to fill this gap by focusing on companies that produce and sell food retail products in Finland — a previously untouched area and a relevant context for exploring foodway transformations at the intersection of production and consumption.

In our qualitative study, we analyze the sustainability sensemaking processes of 15 Finnish food companies by focusing on how company representatives (on a managerial level) talk about sustainability from their organization's point of view. We focus on the socially constructed meanings of sustainability that are created, negotiated, and enacted within the organizations. Our aim is to provide a better understanding of what characterizes the sensemaking processes of food companies and how these influence sustainability-related transformations of current foodways.

The article is structured as follows. Next, we present the theoretical framework of organizational sensemaking and the application of it in food and sustainability studies. This is followed by a description of the methods, context, and data that we used as the basis for our study, continued by our analysis of the findings. In the final section, we discuss the findings and reflect on their broader implications for food system transformation.

Theoretical framework

We apply the concept of organizational sensemaking to sustainability to explore transformations and transgressions of foodways from an organizational perspective. Whereas transformation towards sustainability implies profound changes across systems (Nelson, Tallontire, Opondo & Martin 2014; Helenius, Hagolani-Albov & Koppelmäki 2020), transgression refers to boundary crossings of food practices, knowledge regimes, discourses, and norms (Goodman & Sage 2014), which can lead to food system transformation on a larger scale. The food system is transformed as the actors within it respond to cues in their social, environmental, cultural, political, and economic environments (Ingram & Thornton 2022). Inherent to this is the transgression and changes in foodways, i.e., the cultural and social expressions of food in various activities such as the production, harvesting, processing, cooking, serving, and consumption of food (Peres 2017; Bortolotto & Ubertazzi 2018). Moreover, sustainability is here understood through the distinction between weak and strong sustainability. Weak sustainability rests on the assumption that natural capital is substitutable with human-made capital, while strong sustainability implies that these forms of capital are merely complementary (Daly 1996; Ayres, van den Bergh & Gowdy 2001; Neumeyer 2003). In strong sustainability, social, cultural, and economic systems are considered to be subsystems of the natural system; consequently, sustainability is dependent on the intra- and interactions of these subsystems in a way that does not exceed the natural limits of the biosphere (Ericksen 2008; Dedeurwaerdere 2014). For a transformative change to happen, there is a need to complement solutions based on assumptions of weak sustainability with alternatives informed by the premise of strong sustainability (Daly 1996; Ayres et al. 2001).

In the following, we focus on explicating the theoretical framework of organizational sensemaking and related research, as it forms the basis for our data analysis.

Organizational sensemaking and sensegiving

Sensemaking is an interpretive approach to organization and management research, which builds on the work of Karl E. Weick (see e.g., 1979; 1995; 2001). In its simplest form, sensemaking relates to how people negotiate and sustain meaning of their environment and changing circumstances (Brown, Colville & Pye 2015). It is about turning ambiguous situations into comprehendible ones through continuous processes of noticing and extracting cues from our lived experience, interpreting them, and directing action accordingly (Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). Sensemaking has been characterized as a never-ending cycle of creation (making initial sense through bracketing, noticing, and extracting

cues), interpretation (refining the initial sense into a more complete, narratively organized sense), and enactment (acting upon the more complete sense made). This process typically occurs when something triggers uncertainty and complexity (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005; Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015), and sensemaking has often been studied in cases of major disruptions, changes, or crises (Mills et al. 2010). Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015, 22), however, emphasize that non-episodic and continuous basic activities are equally important foundations of sensemaking.

In the context of organizations, Weick (1995, 17–62) proposed seven explanatory properties of sensemaking. According to this widely accepted framework, sensemaking as a process is grounded in identity construction and retrospective. This means that: "who we think we are (identity) as organizational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity" (Weick et al. 2005, 416). Thus, sensemaking is enactive of sensible environments, and social. Sensemaking is also continuously ongoing, along with being focused on and by extracted cues, i.e., based on personal experience and beliefs, certain elements are chosen and others ignored when creating meaning of an event. Finally, sensemaking is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. We look for cues to form a story that is plausible, not accurate, to be able to go on with our activities. Weick et al. (2005, 409) have conceptualized sensemaking as "an issue of language, talk, and communication," which implies that sensemaking is a linguistic and cognitive activity.

For cultural studies, which are perhaps more familiar with the concept of meaning making, the sensemaking perspective offers a tool to explore how meanings are created and negotiated within organizations. It enables a focus on the social construction of meaning that help individuals and organizations make sense of their world and act (Perey 2015; Fellows & Liu 2016). Sensemaking resonates with the understanding of culture as "meanings and practices produced, sustained, and altered through interaction" (van Maanen 2011, 221) and studies that aim to provide deeper understandings of meaning making in particular contexts. Consequently, sensemaking has commonly been studied through ethnographies and case studies, which are based on information-rich, qualitative data, e.g., interviews and observations (Maitlis & Christianson 2014).

The ethnographic study by Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) has been particularly influential for developing the theoretical foundations of sensemaking. They studied the leaders of a large university that was about to undergo significant organizational changes and found that the leaders' attempts to influence the meaning construction of others were important for redefining

the organizational reality. Through this study, the concept of sensegiving was established, and has later been widely adopted within sensemaking research (e.g., Dunford & Jones 2000; Christianson, Farkas, Sutcliffe & Weick 2009; see also Maitlis & Lawrence 2007). Sensegiving can be seen as a response to the criticism stating that Weick's original view on sensemaking was retrospective, and sensegiving offers a way to also grasp *pro*spective meaning making and action (Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015, 23–25).

While many have focused on leaders' sensegiving (e.g., Rouleau 2005; Foldy, Goldman & Ospina 2008; Sparr 2018), the sensegiving process is not limited to managers but is, in fact, intrinsic to the process of sensemaking in general (Maitlis & Lawrence 2007; Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). According to Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991, 442), sensegiving and sensemaking occur "in an iterative, sequential, and to some extent reciprocal fashion." In other words, a sensegiver is always also a sensemaker. For example, a manager must first make sense of a situation to be able to give sense, and a manager's sensemaking is consequently influenced by others who give sense. Thus, sensegiving connects individual sensemaking processes between actors, and the importance of sensegiving was later also acknowledged by Weick (1995, 61), who stated: "how can I know what I think until I see what I say." In this study, we adhere to the understanding that sensegiving is immanent to and important for the organizational sensemaking process.

Sensemaking research on organizations, food, and sustainability
Perey (2015) analyzed the dynamics between individual- and organizational-level sustainability sensemaking processes. He concluded that embedding sustainability into organizations is dependent on the creation of discursive spaces that allow for new sustainability narratives to become established. Sustainability is, as Perey (2015, 166–170) noted, a polyphonic discourse that requires context and reduced ambiguity to be successfully implemented in organizations. From a sensemaking perspective, sustainability is associated with a large number of interlinked cues that must be interpreted in relation to each other. According to Seidl and Werle (2018, 833–834), such a "strategic meta-problem" (i.e., a problem characterized by a high degree of complexity and unclear boundaries) can exceed the sensemaking capacity of individual organizations. Therefore, organizations that face a strategic meta-problem, such as sustainability, tend to engage in inter-organizational collaboration to pool expertise from outside the organization. Seidl and Werle (2018) demonstrated that the selection of participants for inter-organizational collaboration impacts the dynamics of the sensemaking process in an organization, as the extraction of cues becomes subject to the participants' different interests.

Sensemaking has been widely adopted in organization studies, and increasing attention has been directed towards *sustainability* sensemaking, particularly within the CSR/corporate sustainability field. Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse and Figge (2014) analyzed the differences in corporate responses to sustainability based on two cognitive frames — the business case frame and the paradoxical frame — and discussed how sustainability sensemaking based on these frames rarely leads to radical changes in corporate organizations. They argue that managers with a business case frame tend to focus on narrow sustainability solutions following existing practices, while managers with a paradoxical frame move forward slowly due to their higher awareness of conflicting sustainability aims (ibid.).

A sensemaking perspective has been applied when studying sustainability at various food system scales. Elmes et al. (2016) explored ethical sensemaking among food bank leaders in the United States and pointed to the critical role these actors play in making sense of ethical and justice dimensions of hunger and food-related illnesses. Focusing more on the consumer level, Hilverda et al. (2017) analyzed the sensemaking of organic food through social media data and showed that online interaction with experts and peers impacts the perceptions of risks and benefits related to eating organic foods. Pétursson (2018) similarly analyzed meanings of organic food, through an ethnographic study of consumption practices, and described how organic has turned from niche to mainstream consumption through emotional practices. A practice-oriented approach was also taken by Ocampo et al. (2021), who explored the meaning making of food and sustainability in six restaurants in Sweden. Pétursson (2018) and Ocampo et al. (2021) do not explicitly use the concept of sensemaking, but nevertheless bring forward how the meaning of sustainability is socially constructed and negotiated.

Studies of sustainability sensemaking have also been conducted in the food sector at the organizational level. Van der Heijden and Cramer (2017) examined how individual change agents engage other actors in an agri-food supply chain to shift towards sustainability. In their longitudinal study of a pig farming company, they highlight the importance of supply chain collaboration for sustainability in the food sector and suggest that "sustainability becomes embedded not as a result of a systematic stepwise approach but by skillfully and adaptively navigating social interactions" (van der Heijden & Cramer 2017, 978). Recently, Hübel (2022) analyzed sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship by analyzing the sensemaking processes of top and middle managers in a large meat company. She found that sustainability sensemaking among these managers is an emergent, bidirectional process, i.e., managers make sense *for* and *of* entrepreneurial sustainability activities. Hübel (2022)

further argues that such a bidirectional process can accelerate the sustainability transformation of organizations.

Making sense of sustainability in food industry organizations requires diverse sensemaking processes because of the diverse nature of the environment and the ecological changes that the organizations must deal with (Weick 1979). While not focusing on the food system per se, Whiteman and Cooper's (2011) introduction of *ecological sensemaking* has been important for a more nuanced understanding of the sensemaking processes related to sustainability. Through this concept, they highlight organizational aspects that have previously been argued to be lacking in the sensemaking literature such as ecological materiality and ecological embeddedness (i.e., deep knowledge and experience of specific ecological conditions and the impacts of disturbances). Whiteman and Cooper (2011) emphasize the importance of understanding the processes involved while organizational members create meaning of the dynamics and changes in their natural environment. They showed that actors that are ecologically disembedded focus their enactments on social relations in talk and action and have limited ability to make sense of ecologically material connections. As Whiteman and Cooper (2011, 907-908) argue, ecological sensemaking can provide a valuable concept in times of ecological crises and increased awareness of sustainability issues.

To conclude, research on food companies' sustainability sensemaking processes are rather scarce and limited to a few cases. The perspective taken to sustainability transitions are seldom explicated or discussed in these studies. Therefore, there is a need to broaden existing literature by focusing on a group of food companies and the sustainability sensemaking processes across these organizations. In this paper, we acknowledge the idea of organizational sensemaking as social, interactive, and bidirectional process (sensemaking and sensegiving) that in the context of food systems and sustainability requires organizations to engage in highly complex problems. We assume that transforming current foodways will require the recognition and prioritization of ecological limits, i.e., strong sustainability (Daly 1997; Ayres et al. 2001), and a better understanding of diverse sensemaking processes, including ecological sensemaking (Whiteman & Cooper 2011).

Material and methods

The Finnish food and beverage industry is the largest manufacturer of consumer goods and the fourth largest industry in Finland, making it central to the process of transforming foodways towards sustainability. To understand how food companies perceive and make sense of sustainability, we conducted a qualitative study by interviewing personnel responsible for sustainability

management in 15 Finnish food companies. The first author has over 15 years of experience working within the Finnish food business context in various positions, which supported an in-depth cultural understanding of the industry, along with access to relevant company contacts for the study.

We chose the food and beverage companies for the study based on three characteristics. First, the organizations produce branded, ready-packed food products that are sold to Finnish consumers. The companies are not involved in the production and sales of fresh, unprocessed, and unpacked food such as fruits or fresh fish. Second, the organizations operate as private or listed limited liability corporations. Third, the companies have expressed concern for sustainability issues in their external corporate communication. This means that sustainability is emphasized on their webpages as separate themes or in blogposts, and/or brought forward in company reports. The framing of sustainability varies among the companies, but a brief overview of their external communication shows that most adhere to the conventional three pillars of sustainability (environmental, social, and economic). In particular, the companies emphasize efforts related to environmental and social sustainability, e.g., projects that aim for less environmentally harmful production processes or for ethical and fair trade in the supply chain. The 15 organizations that participated in the study vary in size, as we did not want to restrict the study to only include small or large companies. An overview of these organizations and their sustainability foci is provided in Table 1.

The interview participants were selected based on how actively they are involved in their organization's sustainability matters. Hence, the position and title of the interviewed person varied depending on the organization[1]. When the researcher (the first author) approached the organizations, she asked to be directed to the person(s) most suitable for an interview regarding the organization's sustainability work. Typically, the CEO was the most informed person in smaller companies. In larger companies, sustainability was often managed by a specific sustainability manager or a person involved in marketing and communication. Two organizations (organization 5 and 9 in the table below) had two people involved in driving and taking overall responsibility for sustainability, and the researcher interviewed both. Otherwise, the researcher conducted one interview per organization, following the suggestion of the company. This led to a total of 17 interviews with the 15 organizations. Due to anonymization concerns, the interviews are not linked to the organizations in this article.

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1   The interviewees' titles are listed in the interview list under Sources.

Table 1. Interviewed organizations by size, product type, and company sustainability agenda.

Food company	Size*	Product type	Core sustainability themes as mentioned in external corporate communication
Organization 1	Large	Food	Eco-friendly packaging; Climate change/carbon emissions; Health; Environmentally and socially sustainable supply chain
Organization 2	Small	Food	Organic farming; Carbon neutrality; Nutrition; Traceability of raw materials in the supply chain
Organization 3	Large	Food and beverages	Safe and resource-efficient production; Climate and biodiversity; Animal welfare; Food safety and quality; Supply chain transparency
Organization 4	Large	Beverages	Carbon-neutral production; Recycling; Health; Employee safety and well-being
Organization 5	Large	Food and beverages	Well-being of people and the planet; Climate change; Circular economy; Socially and environmentally sustainable supply chains
Organization 6	Large	Food	Healthy lifestyles; Safe products; Socially and environmentally sustainable supply chains; Carbon footprint
Organization 7	Small	Beverages	Transparency; Ethical and fair supply chains; Package recyclability
Organization 8	Small	Beverages	Local production and supply chains; Recyclability; Carbon compensation
Organization 9	Mid-sized	Food	Eco-efficiency in production to minimize negative environmental impacts; Circularity; Employee well-being; Environmentally friendly farming methods
Organization 10	Large	Food and beverages	Health and nutrition; Human rights and ethical trade; Climate change; Clean water; Circularity; Waste
Organization 11	Small	Food	Locally produced raw materials; Package circularity; Renewable energy in production
Organization 12	Large	Food	Profitable business operations; Safe and high-quality products; Ethically produced raw materials; Carbon neutrality; Employee well-being
Organization 13	Mid-sized	Food	Carbon-neutral eco-efficient production; Organic; Healthy and sustainable eating; Caring for the personnel
Organization 14	Small	Food	Organic; Healthy lifestyles; Transparent sourcing
Organization 15	Large	Food and beverages	Safe and high-quality products; Human well-being; Caring for the environment through the supply chain; Carbon emission reduction

* Small: < 50 employees and annual turnover < 10 million euros; Mid-sized: < 250 employees and annual turnover < 50 million euros; Large: > 250 employees and annual turnover > 50 million euros (according to Statistics Finland's (2022) definition)

The interviews were conducted by the first author during September to December 2021. The ambition was to interview each informant in person and visit each company at their production/office sites to be able to make additional

field observations. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such field work was not possible, and several interviews had to be organized as online meetings. Seven interviews were conducted at the participating company's office, two at the researcher's office, and eight as online meetings. Online meetings have drawbacks compared with physical interviews, such as limiting out informal conversations before and after the interview that may be informative for the study. Still, every online interview was performed with the video turned on, making it a rather normal face-to-face dialogue and comparable with the physical interviews. Each interview, including online and physical meetings, was between 55–90 minutes long. Instead of observing the physical surroundings of the companies, we chose to analyze the companies' digital sustainability material, which was possible for all participants. Access to the field and experiencing the companies' environments would have yielded more versatile material for the researcher. However, the analysis of the companies' webpages and digital reports provided sufficient information on their sustainability strategies (see Table 1).

The aim of the interviews was to capture the process of making sense of sustainability in the participating organizations. Hence, we chose a semi-structured interview methodology, as it is considered a resourceful way for obtaining descriptions of the interviewees' lived experiences (Brinkmann 2018) and useful for exploring multipersonal phenomena such as sensemaking (Bradbury & Lichtenstein 2000; Murto, Hyysalo, Juntunen & Jalas 2020). As Moisander, Närvänen and Valtonen (2020, 9) have noted, the interview is "a vehicle for producing cultural talk, which can be analyzed to gain cultural knowledge about the marketplace." By 'cultural talk', Moisander et al. (2020, 9) refer to social texts that are "produced, shared and used in culturally specific, socially organized ways." In the interviews, we focused on discussing how sustainability is understood within the organization, what the organization does when faced with sustainability issues, and how sustainability has become visible in organizational practices. Additionally, we asked personal questions about how the interviewees perceive sustainability in their private, everyday lives (see the Appendix). While sustainability in this paper is approached from the perspective of weak and strong sustainability, we refrained from defining sustainability during data collection and, instead, left it to the informants to describe sustainability as understood in their organization.

The written interview transcripts (172 pages in Word) and personal notes made by the first author during and directly after each interview (64 pages of handwritten notes) formed the basis of the analysis. Additionally, the first author's experience of working within the Finnish food industry supported the data interpretation. The analysis process was informed by the Gioia methodology (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton 2012); an interpretive, systematic way of

approaching qualitative data that has gained ground within organizational research and influenced the sensemaking and sensegiving literature (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991). The analysis began inductively, as the first author performed a first-order reading of the data, focusing on recurring themes and topics in the interviews. This led to an initial list of identified concepts and constructs. After this, the first author performed a second-order reading of the data, which was more guided by the research question and chosen theoretical framework (sensemaking and sensegiving). Thus, the analysis moved on to a more abductive stage, in which data and theory were considered in tandem (Alvesson & Kärreman 2007; Gioia et al. 2012). In the next phase, both authors conducted a content analysis investigating what kinds of expression the informants used when they positioned their company in relation to sustainability, including how they talked about the organization's sustainability activities; how they described clients, consumers, competitors, and other value chain actors; and how they communicate with these. Content analysis is useful for analyzing sensemaking processes, as it focuses on "themes that are made sense of and are 'talked into existence'" (Jørgensen, Jordan & Mitterhofer 2012, 110).

It is worth noting that many of the interviewees have a background in corporate communications and marketing or have overall responsibility of the company as CEO. Thus, their professional experiences become part of the company's "sustainability talk" that they perform during the interviews. For example, an interviewee with marketing expertise easily emphasizes sustainability branding or a CEO may be focused on the overall economic performance of the company. However, by asking more personal questions related to sustainability, we aimed to reduce this professional bias and positioned the interviewees also as citizens and consumers. The interviewed companies frequently used the metaphor of "profit, people, planet" when referring to economic, social, and ecological aspects of sustainability. Balancing "the 3 Ps," also known as the triple bottom line, was originally introduced by Elkington (2013) and seems to be a core dilemma when food companies are making sense of as well as giving sense to sustainability. As one interviewee explained: *"I also talk about profit, people, and planet all the time, so these 3 Ps; so it's the environment and the people and then of course the profitability. Sustainability just must also be economically sustainable."* (Interviewee 3)

Furthermore, in a sensemaking study it is also important to reflect on how sensemaking occurs not only within the studied organizations but also as part of the research setting. Sense was made and given in the interview sessions, between the first author and the interviewee. As the interviewee described sustainability from an organizational perspective, they were simultaneously engaging in sensegiving, assumably trying to form an educated and knowl-

edgeable discussion around food sustainability issues with the first author. Thus, the interviewees continued to develop their personal and the researcher's understanding of sustainability during the interview sessions.

Findings

Our analysis was initially focused on sensemaking, but as the data unfolded, we recognized that sensegiving was central to the food companies' processes. The company representatives highlighted how they and their company give sense to, as much as they described how they make sense of sustainability. Therefore, we present our findings from both a sensemaking and sensegiving perspective. The distinction between making and giving sense as separate categories provides a useful theoretical tool for the analysis, although they cannot be so clearly distinguished from each other in the activities and processes of the organizations.

Sustainability sensemaking — a food chain-dependent strategic challenge

Finnish food companies perceive sustainability as a complex, strategic problem. The companies are continuously faced with cues in their social and natural surroundings that challenges previously held beliefs about their operations and sustainability. It is an uncertain and complex issue to handle, which involves feelings of ambiguity and unclarity. The interviewees described the organizations' sustainability work as a complicated process of trying to grasp an extremely broad topic, often starting off as a chaos of information and ideas, from which the initial sense of sustainability is gradually created.

> Possibly the largest challenge was this [emissions] compensation world, at least at the beginning. Now it is sort of clear, nothing special around it. But in some way, when it was all totally new, it was just a strange mess. It was difficult to understand how it works. We had to go through it many times, like, does this compensation really save the world. But once we got the catch, well, it was not that confusing…" — Interviewee 9

As Interviewee 9 illustrates in their example of a current sustainability issue (carbon emissions compensation), sense is being made through an iterative process. Sustainability concerns need to be broken down into smaller parts and overseen several times, i.e., the sustainability-related cues are bracketed, selected, and refined to enable the organization to enact the interpretation made. Hence, the sensemaking cycle also involves trade-offs. The interviewees depicted sustainability as a continuous learning process, which requires acceptance of incomplete knowledge and insufficient actions. Step-by-step, the companies take on new areas of sustainability, actively choosing to focus on some aspects while ignoring others. The interviewees emphasized that

the organization cannot do everything, and sustainability therefore involves a continuous, conscious extraction of cues:

> But then again, we cannot do everything at the same time, and it is not worth to, instead we should now concentrate on those things that we have defined to be central to us in the upcoming years. And where we can create a positive impact, and make sure that we concentrate on the right things. — Interviewee 5

When Interviewee 5 talks about "concentrating on the right things" that the organization has "defined to be central," it shows that despite the perceived complexity and difficulty, food companies aim for a rather pragmatic stance to sustainability. The interviewees acknowledged that one organization cannot proceed with all aims concurrently and that working with sustainability involves trade-offs in terms of which issues to focus on and how much resources to put into it. From a sensemaking perspective, this is when the organizations begin refining the initially created sense into a more complete, narratively organized sense, i.e., a more explicit interpretation of what sustainability means for them.

During the interviews, informants often brought forth that food value chain dependency along with business market logics influence which cues are extracted when the organizations create a first sense of sustainability and begin interpreting it. The food companies are situated midway in the food value chain, making them dependent on primary producers for raw material, large retail customers for product distribution and on consumers to buy their products. This dependency appears to make the organizations focus on sustainability cues that are relevant for other proximate actors. For instance, what consumers find important (e.g., more sustainable food packaging) or what sustainability issues farmers are dealing with (e.g., carbon emissions), receives a lot of attention from food companies. The social relations between these actors in the food system are important for extracting cues and interpreting what sustainability means. Additionally, the characteristics of the business market in which the food companies operate, such as growth, profit, and competition orientation, influence how sustainability is perceived and framed. The companies are operating in a competition-driven market, and sustainability perceptions are therefore also made sense of in relation to competitors. This seems to have led to rather quick adaptations in the food business market as a whole, and sustainability is currently perceived as something every food company needs to be involved in. Hence, sustainability was frequently described as navigating among the varying interests and demands of other food system actors, which indicates that sustainability sensemaking is not only a process

taking place within the food company but is also dependent on the sensemaking processes of other organizations.

Together with other food system actors, the food companies gradually refine their sense of sustainability, which can then be enacted. Sustainability enactments that were highlighted, both during the interviews and on the company webpages, often related to environmental sustainability. Such enactments mentioned by the interviewees frequently linked to the food system as a whole or to product-specific aspects. According to the interviewees, awareness of the negative impacts caused by the food system on climate change has been growing during the past couple of years within as well as outside of the organizations. To engage in emissions reduction is therefore considered a "natural" thing to do, as Interviewee 17 explicates, and the ambition of reducing carbon emissions or becoming "carbon neutral" is commonly referred to by food businesses.

> Themes that stand out are, well, naturally climate change, and that concerns our own operations as well as operations down the supply chain. Because the largest emissions come from our type of industry and the activities in the industry's value chain. Also, there is a lot of talk about biodiversity and deforestation and such things.
> —Interviewee 17

Larger companies often talked about collaboration with primary producers to support more environmentally friendly farming and better social conditions (e.g., fair trade or social justice), which indicates that social sustainability throughout the supply chain is also being put into practice. Additionally, enactments of sustainability at the product or consumption level were emphasized. The interviewees narrowed down the level of discussion from planet to product (profit) by pointing out that sustainability can include different things depending on the product. They argued that the perceptions of consumers and producers meet at the product level; thus, aspects relevant at the food consumption stage also influence which cues the organization initially focuses on when making sense of sustainability. For example, packaging was pointed out as a central issue related to sustainability. Food packaging, which usually is made of plastics, is considered a large environmental problem and something that consumers are concerned about. The reduction in plastics use and improving the recyclability of individual product packages has therefore become a way to engage in environmental sustainability for many food businesses. Moreover, the importance of taste, product quality/safety, and nutrition was frequently stressed. The interviewees talked about the relevance of providing people with safe and nutritious food, i.e., focusing on more social aspects of sustainability (people). The interviewees argued that sustainability

cannot be achieved with products that taste bad and are of low quality. One interviewee put this notion into words:

> It is our task to support the change [sustainability transition] by bringing products that are really good, because if they weren't good, then nobody would buy them and that wouldn't change the world in any way. — Interviewee 14

Interviewee 14 asserted that more (environmentally) sustainable food products are not enough to change the course of the food system. The products need to be "good" as well, i.e., they need to taste good and be of high quality for people to be willing to buy them. This indicates that sustainability sensemaking in the food system is also a socio-material process. In other words, food companies, along with other actors in the system make sense of sustainability through material aspects of the food that are part of our social foodways.

The food companies' notion that food system change requires the consumption of "better" and tasty products shows a concern for the planet and people, but it also demonstrates that a sustainability transition is expected to come about through increased consumption and by outcompeting other products. Such market logic can furthermore be identified in the way sustainability has been normalized in the food system, as food companies compete for market shares and try to differentiate from one another.

> So, if we go back, say, three years, then sustainability was perhaps a sort of differentiating factor in food. You could profile a product with it. But now it is becoming more and more a hygiene factor and a sort of license to operate, it is strange if you don't do it [sustainability]. — Interviewee 6

Interviewee 6 calls sustainability a "hygiene factor," which no longer differentiates a company from others. This depicts the influence of market logics on how sustainability is perceived and shows that sustainability has been normalized among food companies. This normalization of sustainability also became clear during the interviews through the way in which the interviewees talked about their organizations' sustainability enactments. The business representatives (particularly from larger companies) mastered the concepts of sustainability (language) and even the technical terms, which made them seem knowledgeable in the area.

> We are talking a great deal with the retailers about regenerative farming, like, how could we arrange carbon farming education at the farms…and then, of course, all these fields and especially the reduction of emissions from peat fields, and the reduction

of emissions from production. And then we come to [the topic of] biodiversity, which currently seems to be very interesting. —Interviewee 3

Interviewee 3 uses several concepts and words that show a rather detailed understanding of sustainability, such as "emissions from peat fields" and "biodiversity." When the interviewee uses specific terms (e.g., "regenerative farming"), it underlines that the organization has to some degree acknowledged the link between natural processes and the business. The normalization of sustainability in the industry seems to have led to an established language and a common understanding of which sustainability aspects are important. The interviewees used statements such as "naturally climate change" (Interviewee 17), which further strengthen the normalization of sustainability in the food business.

Overall, sustainability sensemaking in food companies involves navigating among various domains and demands. One the one hand, sustainability is connected to feelings of complexity; a broad and difficult issue to handle. On the other hand, sustainability has been normalized within the food business, and the interviewees were able to talk about it in a professional manner. Enactments of environmental or social sustainability are often emphasized, but economical reasonings seem to currently be guiding the actions (e.g., staying in business, profiting from certain products). The continuous sensemaking cycle (creation, interpretation, and enactment) of the food companies appears to be directed towards the social relations and dependencies present in the food value chain.

Sustainability sensegiving — communicating and taking leadership in the field

The focus of most discussions with the company managers turned to sustainability communication and various types of social interaction. The interviewees explained how their perception of sustainability continuously develops through reading and by attending seminars and education sessions organized by other industry actors. In addition to these somewhat formal modes of interaction, the influence of casual discussions in private situations was also highlighted. The interviewees illustrated how conversations with friends, family, and colleagues, as well as simply following the "sustainability buzz," often provide a source of input for making sense of sustainability, as Interviewee 15 describes:

It [the sustainability understanding] also comes from discussions with people, friends, and many others. And many things might come this way, like "hey, did you know…?",

like the word-of-mouth method is probably really important. But of course, I am interested, I read a lot of newspapers. — Interviewee 15

The quote above shows that social interaction and everyday conversations are essential for developing a sustainability understanding and points to the importance of *giving* sense as a way to *make* sense (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991). Informal discussions in private situations influence the perceptions of sustainability that are then fed into the organizational sensemaking process by organizational members. When describing how the organization forms its interpretation of sustainability, the interviewees mentioned various social occasions. In some organizations, which do not work with sustainability on a strategic level (often smaller companies), sustainability was presented as growing organically from within the organization through casual discussions. In other organizations that have taken sustainability to a higher strategic level (larger companies in general) — including explicated visions, roadmaps, and structures for how to work with sustainability — external connections were also emphasized. The interviewees noted that it is important to create social networks outside their own company and connect with researchers and other experts to stay up-to-date with sustainability issues. Hence, different kinds of co-operations in relation to sustainability, e.g., with research institutes, NGOs, or other organizations in the food value chain, were often mentioned:

> We are now collaborating a lot with different partners, like LUKE [Natural Resources Institute Finland], SYKE [Finnish Environment Institute], ETT [Animal Health ETT], and BSAG [Baltic Sea Action Group], these kinds of actors. And then of course retail actors and our direct customers, like industry customers, HoReCa [the Hotel, Restaurant, Catering sector]. So of course, we also get a great deal of information this way. —Interviewee 3

> I have realized that always when I give a presentation, like "this is our roadmap and these are the [sustainability] pillars", and someone asks, "what does this and that mean?", e.g., deforestation and how can we be sure that there is no deforestation. Then I go "mmm, wait a moment"… such situations, and through such questions; when you start to get hard questions and you need to go deeper and deeper, that's how you learn. — Interviewee 13

As Interviewees 3 and 13 describe, interacting with other actors within as well as outside the food system is not only a way to gain information and extract cues about sustainability; it is also a tool for sharing how the company approaches and understands sustainability. Being a sensegiver (a leader rather

than a follower) portrays the food companies and their sustainability managers as active agents in the field.

The interviewed food companies described sensegiving as important for establishing an organizational narrative around sustainability and for taking sustainability leadership in the industry. The interviewees asserted that their organization is a sustainability forerunner and that the company has been involved in sustainability longer than many other competitors. Such claims were made by most interviewees, regardless of their company's size or products. Interviewee 11 exemplified this by stating that their organization is only talking about "real" sustainability actions, while indicating that competitors are exaggerating and doing more talking than acting:

> One main point is that we talk about those real [sustainability] issues, what we *do*, with concrete examples. We don't only declare that we are the best in the world at something... — Interviewee 11

Interviewee 11 does not explicate exactly what is meant by "real issues," but their statement shows an attempt to downplay what competing organizations are doing and saying while legitimizing their own company's efforts. The interviewee's company is posited as a forerunner that acts ("what we do") for a more sustainable food system. Communicating this was, however, considered slow and frustrating. This became clear through the way the interviewees talked about consumers and competitors. According to the interviewees, consumers are unable to process the flux of information related to sustainability, and food organizations should guide consumers towards more sustainable foodways. Interviewee 17 verbalized their thoughts on this:

> Then how do we commercialize our sustainability work and what gets the consumer interested, because these are such difficult issues that most consumers don't...they don't have a clue. They are not interested in our Scope 1 and 2 emission reductions. — Interviewee 17

The interviewee emphasizes that consumers are unaware of company sustainability processes, such as Scope 1 and 2 emission reductions (a scientific method for measuring carbon emissions), and ignorant of sustainability on a more in-depth level. By positioning consumers in this way, the interviewee pictures the food company as a more highly educated actor that should take responsibility for sustainability.

The fear of being blamed for either doing too little or talking too much was often reflected in the interviews (and the informants often blamed their com-

petitors of such behaviors). On the one hand, doing too little could constitute a reputational risk, for example, if the company disregards certain sustainability issues that salient stakeholders consider to be the responsibility of the company. On the other hand, if the organization focuses too strongly on talking rather than doing, it may be accused of greenwashing. This is described by Interviewee 14, who emphasizes the focus on communication and marketing in the company's sustainability enactments, and by Interviewee 11, who talks about reputation management:

> The whole production is carbon neutral and now we are thinking about how to define it and what to say about it, on what level. Today the news [talked] about a company in Sweden that had gotten attention because of their advertisements. They claim to have net zero emissions, or whatever they say, but this was found to be misleading. — Interviewee 14

> In a way, it is also crisis management. Because if you might get caught for [doing] things [unsustainably], well, nowadays such things spread like wildfire through social media. A large company like this cannot afford such a situation, in which our values are questioned. — Interviewee 11

The quote by Interviewee 14 illustrates the food companies' anxiety about slipping into bragging and greenwashing while getting others to understand that they handle sustainability issues in a professional manner. Concurrently, if the company does and says nothing about sustainability, their whole business may be at risk, as Interviewee 11 worries. Hence, sustainability sensegiving is a balancing act for food companies.

Altogether, the focus on communication and positioning, which was brought forth during the interviews, illustrates the active sensegiver position that food companies are taking. In this position, the food companies can choose to focus on cues that are relevant for legitimizing the company's own operations and creating a credible image towards other actors. For the food companies, sustainability sensemaking is an iterative and social process of continuously engaging in highly complex issues. This process is characterized by intra- and inter-organizational interaction taking place between the various actors in the food value chain as well as between the company and its individual organizational members. In this process, sustainability language has been normalized as part of the general food discourse, and food companies push transformational acts to the socio-material spheres of food products consumed by individuals.

Conclusions

The studied food companies perceive sustainability as a broad and complex issue; a continuous learning process characterized by ambiguity, unclear boundaries, and trade-offs. Our findings confirm Perey's (2015, 169) suggestion that "sustainability […] presents the sense-maker with polysemy, with competing priorities, not only from multiple contexts to which the term is applied, but also from the paradoxical imperatives inherent in its definitions […]." The companies struggle to balance the different contexts that they are operating in (e.g., the food retail business, agricultural production, consumer everyday practices) and the 3 Ps (profit, people, planet), with business case framings often being prioritized (see e.g., Hanh et al. 2014). This balancing act develops in a process of making and giving sense, through which a plausible narrative is formed that enables the food company to go on with its activities. According to our findings, this process is continuous and non-episodic (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015) and is characterized by social and communicative activities (Weick 1995; Weick et al. 2005).

For the studied food companies, sustainability constitutes a strategic meta-problem, which, according to Seidl and Werle (2018), often leads organizations to engage in inter-organizational collaboration to ensure sufficient variety of perspectives for the sensemaking process. Seidl and Werle (2018) suggest that organizations actively select collaborators, but based on our findings, we argue that inter-organizational collaboration also occurs more as a passive act out of necessity. This is due to the dependencies on other value chain actors that the food companies must manage. Food companies cannot act or change in isolation from the processes of primary producers, the demands of powerful retailers, and consumer practices. Their operations are contingent on collaboration with these actors and so are their sustainability sensemaking processes. Furthermore, the sensemaking process is not only taking place at the organizational level, between food companies and other external actors. It is also occurring between the individual and the organizational spheres, as the individual organizational members make sense of sustainability. In the studied Finnish food companies, the perceptions and understandings of sustainability, which were created as part of the private lives of the organizational members, were interlinked with the organizational sensemaking process and cues were fed from the individual to the organizational spheres, and vice versa. Similar interlinkages of individual and organizational sensemaking processes were also noted by Perey (2015). Moreover, our findings reinforce the argument put forward by van der Heijden and Cramer (2017) that sustainability sensemaking in food value chains is, in fact, an act of navigating and adapting to social interactions and a less clear and systematic process than the organizations aim to externally communicate.

As emphasized in earlier organizational sensemaking research (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991; Maitlis & Lawrence 2007; Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015), our study also points to the importance of giving sense as a way to make sense. The interviews uncovered how the meaning of sustainability is socially constructed (see e.g., Pétursson 2018; Ocampo et al. 2021) through both informal and formal discussions along with various forms of interaction within and outside the organization. A sensegiving imperative seems to prevail among food companies, as they stress their central position for gathering information concerning sustainability, reducing its complexity, and spreading knowledge to other food system actors. Food companies act as sensegivers and actively communicate with consumers, farmers, competitors, and employees to achieve a position of a knowledgeable sustainability forerunner. Thus, food companies have taken it as their responsibility to not only make sense of but to also give sense to sustainability. This bidirectional process has been identified in previous research (e.g., Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991; Sparr 2018; Hübel 2022) and is, according to our study, important for the sustainability sensemaking of food companies. However, whether such bidirectionality accelerates a sustainability transformation, as Hübel (2022) argues, cannot be determined based on our study, which was focused on the characteristics of the sensemaking process. We suggest researchers continue with this topic to turn more attention to temporal aspects of sustainability transformations in the food system, e.g., by analyzing specific sustainability enactments of food producers and consumers and the rhythms of changing food practices.

For transforming foodways, it is important to acknowledge that food companies are positioning themselves as sustainability sensegivers. In the ongoing process of reducing complexity and capturing sustainability in language — which food companies increasingly seem to be taking agency for — food-related narratives are created and changed. On the one hand, our study indicates that sustainability has been normalized in the talk and action of the food companies and their representatives. Considering the central position of food companies in the food value chain, these narratives inevitably spread to other food system actors. For instance, if food companies integrate the concept of carbon emissions into their products and brand marketing on a large scale, such new food features will gradually turn from niche to mainstream (Pétursson 2018) also among consumers. Consequently, this is likely to influence what and how consumers talk about in relation to food. On the other hand, Perey (2015, 167–168) maintained that for sustainability to become successfully embedded, the organization must provide sufficient discursive space to its members to enable new sustainability narratives to get established. Currently, the dominant role of the 3 Ps (profit, people, planet)

appears to limit the discursive space to a win-win-win paradigm or to weak sustainability assumptions, in which business and profit-making logics dominate social and ecological aims. To enable more radical changes based on the idea of strong sustainability, i.e., the economic and social systems are subordinate to the ecological system (Ayres et al. 2001; Neumeyer, 2002; Dedeurwaerdere, 2014), more numerous and less narrow discursive spaces may be needed within food companies.

The studied companies try to legitimize and commercialize their sustainability enactments in their external communication, although this was often perceived as risky (being accused of either greenwashing or of not doing enough). While the food companies acknowledge system-level sustainability, i.e., the link between their business and the ecological system, they tend to focus their enactments on selected parts of the food chain, e.g., packaging, or on the product level, e.g., product quality. Such enactments are tangible and comprehendible for individual consumers and, thus, easy to commercialize for the food companies. As they shift the focus of their communication to product-level enactments of sustainability and argue that food system transformation can only occur through "better" products and changed consumer behavior, socio-material transgressions of current foodways emerge. For instance, as food companies promote new products or packages and market them as "better" and "more sustainable," they establish what is to be considered as good and sustainable in relation to food. Consequently, this pushes consumers to reassess their food activities such as changing recipes or how food packages are recycled. The cultural and social expressions of food activities (Peres 2017; Bortolotto & Ubertazzi 2018) are influenced and changed through the food companies' sensemaking and sensegiving processes.

Socio-material aspects of a foodways transformation seemed to prevail among the studied food companies, but Whiteman and Cooper (2011) have argued that ecological materiality should receive more attention. Rather than focusing on cues in the natural environment, food companies seem to turn their attention to signals and information from customers, competitors, and consumers to enable successful business development. Such a focus on social relations in talk and action, instead of ecological cues, indicates a rather low degree of ecological embeddedness; consequently, important ecological material connections of the food system may be overlooked by the food companies (Whiteman & Cooper 2011). Moreover, such ecological disemebeddeness does not support the notion of strong sustainability, i.e., acknowledging that the socio-economic system is dependent on the ecological system and its natural limits (Dedeurwaerdere, 2014). We argue that a shift from communicating and commercializing sustainability to a focus on ecological material

aspects and ecological sensemaking (Whiteman & Cooper 2011) is essential for transforming foodways towards strong sustainability. Examples of this can often be found in small-scale, local agri-food organizations, but the meaning of ecological embeddedness in larger industrial food corporations should be further examined.

Complex objects in a diverse environment require complex sensing systems and diverse organizational sensemaking processes (Weick 1995; Seidl & Werle 2018). We have presented the sustainability sensemaking processes of food companies as a multilevel, multifaceted phenomenon, which influences current foodways and contributes to sustainability transformations of the food system. Sustainability and organizational sensemaking are always context dependent, and with this article, we have contributed to the understanding of sensemaking and -giving in the context of food business. We have also advanced the understanding of *sustainability* sensemaking as a theoretical concept. Future research could continue to develop an even more nuanced picture of sustainability sensemaking by adding similar research from other contexts or by focusing on certain phases of the sensemaking cycle (e.g., the enactments or particular framings) of food sustainability. Furthermore, we suggest increased focus on ecological sensemaking, which may provide a valuable alternative perspective to understanding sustainability in times of intensified food system crises.

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SOURCES

Interview materials

The interview material consists of 17 interview transcripts and notes that the first author wrote during and after each interview. All research materials are in the first author's possession and are stored digitally at the University of Helsinki. Detailed information and archival codes will not be presented to protect the anonymity of the interviewees. The list of informants below does not follow the same order as the organizations in Table 1. All interviews were conducted by the first author.

Interviewee 1. September 28, 2021. Manager, Public affairs. Interview conducted at the food company office.

Interviewee 2. October 11, 2021. CEO. Interview conducted at the food company office.

Interviewee 3. October 12, 2021. Sustainability director. Interview conducted via Zoom.

Interviewee 4. October 12, 2021. Brand manager. Interview conducted via Teams.

Interviewee 5. October 15, 2021. Communication and sustainability director. Interview conducted at the interviewer's office.

Interviewee 6. October 21, 2021. Sustainability and public affairs director. Interview conducted at the food company office.

Interviewee 7. October 27, 2021. Communication director. Interview conducted at the food company office.

Interviewee 8. November 2, 2021. CEO. Interview conducted at the food company office.

Interviewee 9. November 5, 2021. CEO. Interview conducted via Zoom.

Interviewee 10. November 10, 2021. Owner, Chairman of the board. Interview conducted via Zoom.

Interviewee 11. November 16, 2021. Commercial director. Interview conducted via Zoom.

Interviewee 12. November 16, 2021. Sustainability manager. Interview via Teams.

Interviewee 13. November 19, 2021. Marketing and brand manager. Interview conducted via Zoom.

Interviewee 14. November 23, 2021. Quality, sustainability and legal director. Interview conducted at the food company office.

Interviewee 15. November 25, 2021. Commercial director. Interview conducted at the food company office.

Interviewee 16. December 8, 2021. CEO. Interview conducted at the interviewer's office.

Interviewee 17. December 10, 2021. Strategy and sustainability director. Interview conducted via Zoom.

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APPENDIX
Interview guide

These questions formed the basis of each interview but were adapted according to the discussion (including ignoring and adding some questions if needed).

Sustainability in the organization

- How would you describe sustainability from the perspective of your organization?
- How is sustainability present in your organization? Could you give an example of some specific situations?
- Could you describe your own work in the organization and how sustainability is present in it?
- Could you give an example of a recent sustainability activity in the organization?
- Where did the initiative for this activity come from?
- How did you obtain the information and knowledge regarding this sustainability matter?
- Which topics have become important during the last couple of years? Why do you think this is?
- How do you prioritize what to focus on in terms of sustainability?
- Could you describe any challenges regarding sustainability in your organization? How do you experience these challenges?
- Have you experienced any successful situation in terms of sustainability in your organization? Could you give an example?
- How has sustainability impacted the way your organization approaches consumers?
- What do you think makes your organization and its products sustainable?

Personal questions

- What does sustainability mean to you personally?
- How is sustainability present in your private, everyday life?
- What kind of consumer are you?
- Has sustainability impacted your behavior and habits? Could you describe how?
- In what kind of situations do you usually encounter sustainability matters?

Concluding questions

- What kind of thoughts and feelings does this discussion trigger in you?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?