

ECOLOGICAL COMPANY – EMPLOYEE AND MANAGER PERSPECTIVES

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Purpose: This paper aims to compare the evaluation of a company's environmental performance from the perspective of employees and managers of Polish companies.

Design/methodology/approach: The article identifies how employees evaluate their company's ecological activities, as well as what guides managers when making decisions in this regard. To do so, the following methods were used: literature study, analysis and synthesis, deductive reasoning.

Findings: According to the employees, the companies are taking single rather than comprehensive environmental initiatives. They are guided primarily by economic considerations and legal requirements in their decisions regarding these activities. Most of the surveyed employees would like their workplace to be more environmentally friendly. This is also an important motivation for taking a job at a particular company.

Practical implications: The conclusions and suggestions formulated can be useful, first of all, for company managers to undertake more comprehensive green activities in line with the expectations of employees. This can have a positive effect on increasing their motivation and involvement and, consequently, improving the enterprise's performance.

Originality/value: The paper highlights the need for planning comprehensive environmental strategies and better communication between managers and employees in this area.

Keywords: ecological company, sustainability, CSR, green behaviors, green business practices.

Category of the paper: Conceptual paper.

1. Introduction

In today's dynamic economic and social reality, environmental issues are becoming a priority not only for governments and social organizations, but also for businesses. They are taking steps to protect the environment and society within the framework of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the pursuit of sustainable development not only under the pressure

of regulations or public opinion (Kahn, Badulescu, 2025), but also the growing demands of key stakeholders (primarily consumers and business partners) in this regard.

Both management and employee involvement are important in these processes. Employees' inclination toward environmentally friendly behavior in the workplace depends not only on their personalities, ties to nature, and attitudes toward environmental protection, but also on organizational support and management's environmental behavior (Carbone et al., 2024; Unsworth et al., 2021). In turn, managers' personal values and attitudes toward environmental problems influence their decisions on this issue indirectly (Candrianto, Aimon, Sentosa, 2022). Decision-makers face a dilemma of trade-offs between economic (e.g., financial returns), environmental (e.g., carbon emissions) and social (i.e., pressure from various stakeholder groups) aspects (Narayanan, Baird, Tay, 2021; Alowais, 2024). The effectiveness of efforts to build an ecological company depends on effective cooperation between managers and employees, with top management taking more initiative.

Polish companies are taking steps toward being a green business for several reasons. First, they need to comply with both national and European Union environmental legislation. Among the most important are: Environmental Protection Law (Dz.U. 2001, No. 62, item 627, as amended), Law on Obligations of Entrepreneurs in Managing Certain Waste and Product and Deposit Fee (Dz.U. 2001, No. 63, item 639, as amended), Law on Packaging and Packaging Waste Management (Dz.U. 2013, item 888), National Environmental Policy (Dz.U. 2019, No. 67, item 794) (Marks-Bielska et al., 2022, p. 29). The key strategic document in this regard is the "State Environmental Policy 2030 - Strategy for Development in the Area of Environment and Water Management" - PEP2030, adopted on July 16, 2019 (BIP, 2019). The goal of PEP2030 is to transform the Polish economy towards sustainable development, improve the quality of the environment and the health of citizens, sustainably manage natural resources, and mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Green products are increasingly valued by consumers (Reichheld, Peto, Ritthaler, 2023) especially the young (Adnan, Ahmad, Khan, 2017), and environmentally friendly technologies, production and distribution systems are expected by partners in sustainable supply chains (Li, X., Li, Y., Li, G. et al., 2025). In addition, companies pursuing progressive sustainability strategies are more likely to have sustainable growth and a better reputation (Shmelev, Gilardi, 2025; Frank, Lucky, Special, 2025).

In the quest to be a green company, it is necessary to involve both the company's management and its employees. However, the knowledge, awareness, attitudes of managers and employees to environmental issues do not always coincide. Meanwhile, effective communication and cooperation between managers and subordinates in this regard are essential.

The purpose of the article is to identify perceptions of the company's environmental performance from the perspective of managers and employees. Accordingly, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do employees evaluate their company's green commitment?
2. What green activities do employees expect from their company?
3. What are the motives of managers for taking green initiatives?
4. What is the attitude of managers towards the green activities undertaken in the company?

The article uses the following research methods: literature study, analysis and synthesis, deductive reasoning.

The study consists of the following sections. Section 2 describes the characteristics and business practices of an ecological enterprise. Section 3 shows changes in Poles' attitudes toward ecology over the 2018-2024 period. In section 4, it is presented how Polish employees and managers assess the level of environmental performance of their companies. Section 5 is discussion and conclusions.

2. Ecological enterprise and its business practices

An ecological company (also referred to as a green, eco-friendly, environmentally responsible or sustainable firm) is an organization that conducts its operations in a way that minimizes harm to the environment. Green companies implement environmentally responsible practices throughout their value chain, from sourcing raw materials to production processes and distribution (Kleiner, 1991).

From the 1990s to today, a great many definitions of a green company have been formulated. The first ones emphasized conducting business in a way that ensures that negative environmental impacts are minimized. An example is the following definition: "A green company integrates environmental considerations into its business operations and decision-making processes in order to minimize negative environmental impact while promoting sustainability" (Chen, Lai, Wen, 2006).

In contemporary approaches, it is more common to talk about conducting activities in accordance with the principles of sustainable development, which contribute to the reduction of environmental pollution, meet relevant standards and satisfy the requirements of various stakeholder groups. One can cite the approach proposed by Rahmani et al., (2024): „Green companies develop and implement green product, process, or organizational innovations to reduce environmental harm, comply with regulations, and meet stakeholder expectations".

Corporate green practices cover a wide spectrum of initiatives and activities, from energy conservation, waste segregation and reduction to the use of clean technologies, green transportation and employee education (Franco, Rodriguez, 2019; Wysocki, Strychalska-Rudzewicz, 2025). Wolniak and Grebski (2023), comparing the business practices of traditional and sustainable companies, point to a number of important differences. The most important of these are included in Table 1.

Table 1.
Traditional versus sustainable business practices

Traditional business practices	Sustainable business practices
Focus primarily on short-term profitability and financial gains	Emphasize long-term value creation and consider the triple bottom line (people, planet, profit)
Primarily driven by profit maximization	Balance economic, environmental, and social considerations
Limited consideration for environmental impacts	Actively mitigate and reduce environmental impacts
Linear production and consumption models	Promote circular economy principles and sustainable supply chain practices
Short-term cost savings prioritized	Recognize the long-term economic benefits of sustainable practices

Source: Own work based on: Wolniak and Grebski, 2023.

It can be said that a traditional enterprise, unlike a green one, makes decisions guided solely by economic criteria, disregarding their social and environmental consequences.

More advanced in implementing sustainability principles and practices, companies are transforming their business models and organizational architecture (Visnjic, Monteiro, Tushman, 2025). They are implementing so-called “green business models,” which aim to build value by producing high-quality products while striving to reduce costs and mitigate harmful environmental impacts (Solesvik et al., 2022; Trapp, Kanbach, 2021). Green business models are based on the concepts of a closed loop economy, eco-innovation and sustainable supply chain management, among others (Odeyemi et al., 2024).

3. Poles towards ecology - attitudes and actions in 2018-2024

Poles' attitudes toward ecology and their declared pro-environmental activities are the subject of many studies, conducted by various institutions and research agencies. With regard to attitudes, EKObarometer¹, a cyclic survey of Polish consumers', employees' and employers' attitudes toward ecological issues, has been selected. The survey assessed the importance and attitudes of Poles toward ecology. Of the 29 values identified, ecology was ranked 22nd. Fundamental values such as health, family, love, security were cited as the most important. On the other hand, fame, power, minimalism were found to be the least important.

¹ The research is conducted by SW RESEARCH Agency for Market and Opinion Research using the online interview method (CAWI) on the SW Panel internet panel. Six editions have been carried out since 2020 - three in 2020, and another in 2022, 2023 and 2024. The data is taken from the report of the fourth edition of EKObarometer 2024. The sample consisted of 1,500 respondents, selected representative according to the criteria: age, gender and size of place of residence.

With regard to attitudes, the following four were distinguished: eco-enthusiasts, eco-pragmatists, eco-possessors and eco-critics. Table 2 shows the definitions of the listed attitudes and their percentages in the 1st and 6th editions.

Table 2.
Attitudes of Poles towards ecology

Attitudes	Definition	2020 Edition I	2024 Edition VI	Changes
Eco-enthusiasts	People who are eager to buy bio-certified products choose organic food and organic packaging	31%	24%	-7pp.
Eco-pragmatists	People who have pro-environmental beliefs, but take actions that give financial savings	28%	33%	+5pp.
Eco-possessors	People who are less likely to use green practices than demonstrate their green lifestyles	26%	27%	+1pp.
Eco-critics	People skeptical about the state of the environment	15%	16%	+1pp.

Source: Own work based on: *EKObarometr 2024*, Raport 6 edycji, czerwiec 2024, p. 36. <https://swresearch.pl/raporty/ekobarometr-pelna-wersja-raportu-z-szostego-pomiaru>

As can be seen, in the 1st edition's ratings, eco-enthusiasts were the largest group, while eco-critics were the smallest. The groups of eco-pragmatists and eco-enthusiasts were of similar size (28% and 27%). In contrast, in the 6th edition, the number of enthusiasts decreased by 7 p.p., while the number of ecopragmatists increased by 5 p.p.. The size of the other groups increased by only 1 p.p.

With regard to the ecological behavior of Poles, the results of a survey of Poles' awareness and behavior entitled Survey of Ecological Awareness and Behavior of Polish Residents (2024) were used. This is a tracking survey commissioned to a selected research company by the Ministry of Climate and Environment since 2011. The report contains the current results from the survey conducted in 2024, along with their comparison with the results from 2011-2022. This allows one to observe the dynamics of changes in the ecological behavior of Poles. The survey is conducted using the CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) method on a representative sample of 1000 Polish citizens. Figure 1 shows the dynamics of changes in environmental activities declared by Poles in 2018-2024.

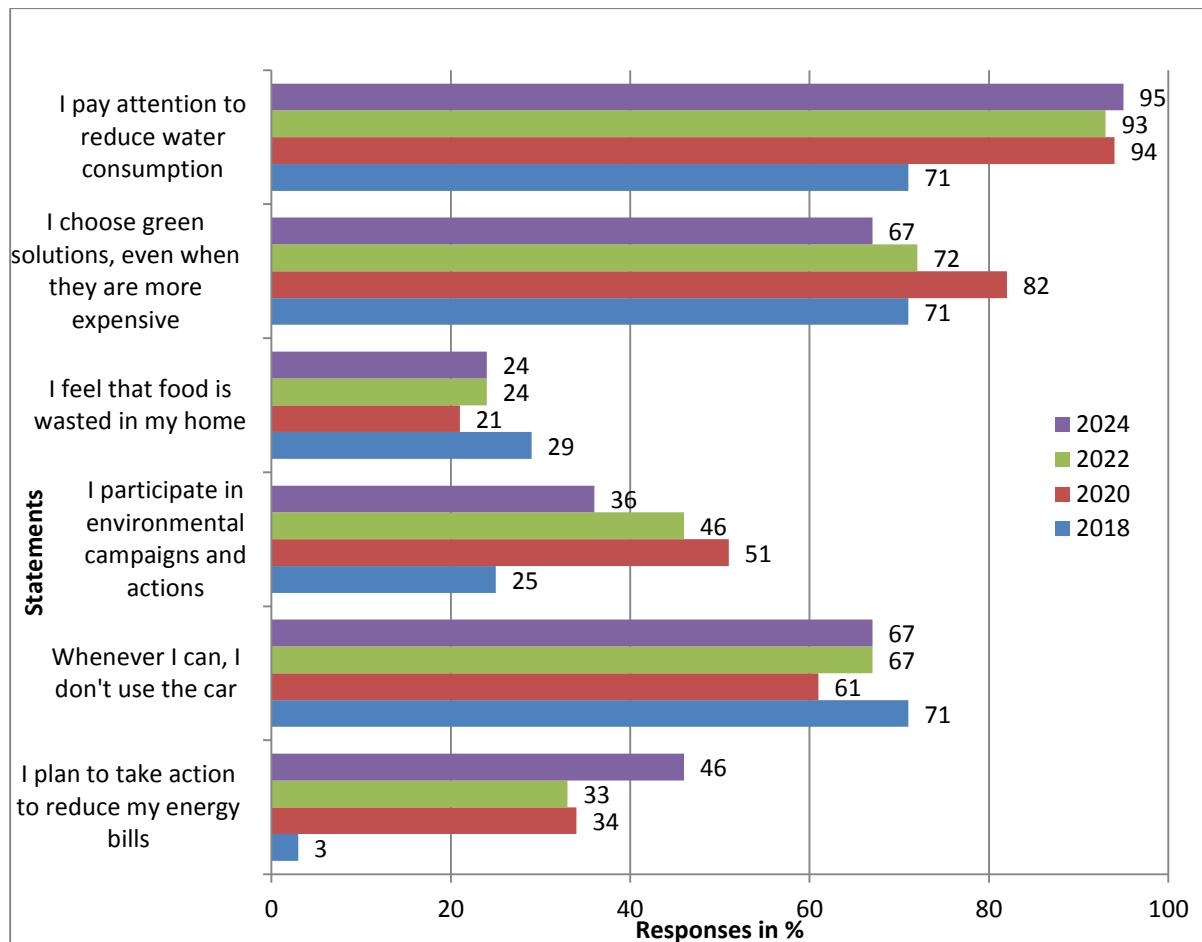


Figure 1. Pro-ecological activities of Poles in 2018-2024 (answers in %)*.

*Sum of responses: “rather and strongly agree”.

Source: Own work based on: *Badanie świadomości i zachowań ekologicznych mieszkańców Polski. Raport z badań trackingowych, wrzesień 2024*. Ministerstwo Klimatu i Środowiska, pp. 97-102.

As shown, in recent years, almost all respondents (94-95%) said they save water. The feeling of wasting food at home dropped from 29% in 2018 to 24% in 2024. There was a radical increase in the number declaring to take possible measures to reduce energy bills (from 3% in 2018 to 46% in 2024). This is probably due to high inflation and a significant increase in energy prices. The decline in real incomes of Poles should also be explained by the decrease in declarations of choosing green solutions, even if they were more expensive (from 82% in 2020 to 67% in 2024). On the other hand, participation in environmental campaigns has steadily declined since 2020, from 51% to 36%. The use of means of transportation other than the car (implicitly: internal combustion), if possible, was declared by 67% of respondents in recent years.

4. Is my company green? Opinions of employees and managers

The basis for assessing the perception of the company's environmental performance in the opinion of employees and managers is the analysis of data from the above-mentioned EKObarometer 2024 survey. The question was asked to people who have a permanent job, are co-owners of companies, are self-employed or work on a casual basis.

Survey respondents assessed their companies' involvement in environmental activities. The vast majority (79%) said that their company undertakes such activities. However, more than half of them (56%) admitted that these are isolated initiatives. In contrast, 21% of respondents said their company does not take any actions to protect the environment (Figure 2).

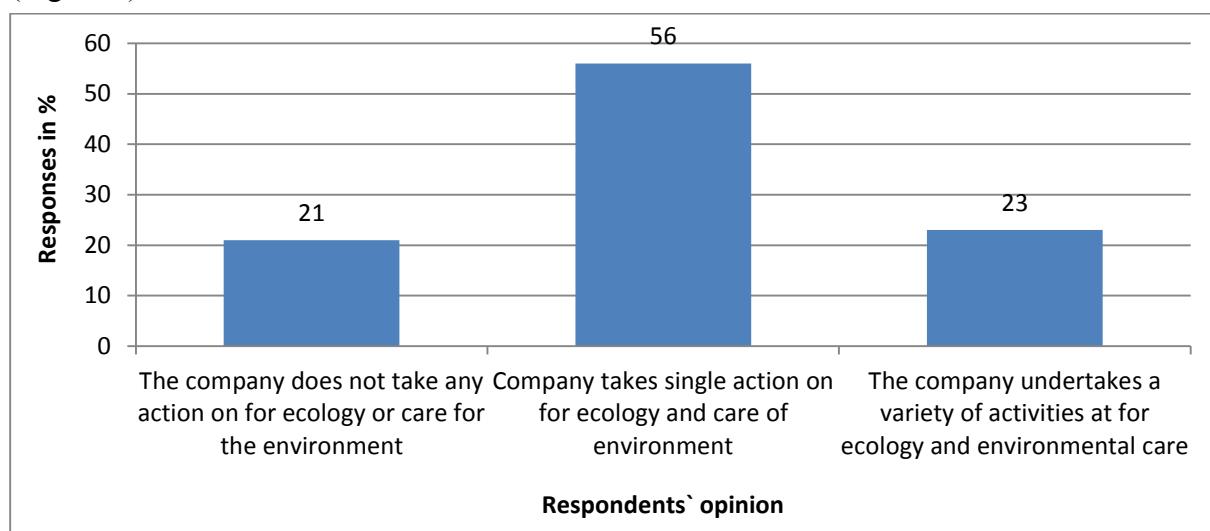


Figure 2. Employees' opinions on the environmental performance of their company (in %).

Source: EKObarometr 2024, p. 49.

When asked about the motivations/intentions behind the company's green approach, respondents ranked resource conservation and cost reduction and the need to comply with regulations in the top two places (Figure 3). This was followed by promotional motives (building a green image, responding to customer demands), and the desire to acquire new, cost-effective technologies. Only in penultimate place was indicated the desire to be a green company, in accordance with its professed value system.

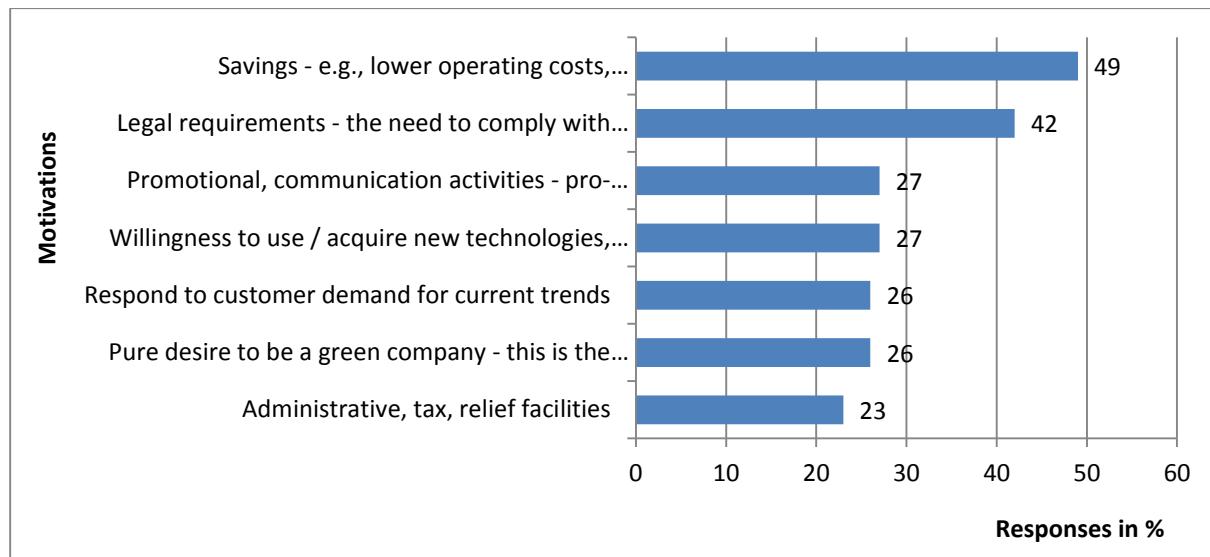


Figure 3. Motivations for companies to take environmental action (answers in %)².

Source: EKObarometr 2024, p. 49.

The surveyed employees were also asked about green solutions in the workplace and their involvement in their company's environmental activities (Table 3).

Table 3.
Employee involvement in environmentally friendly activities in the workplace

Statements	Answers*
<i>My workplace is comfortable and safe</i>	70%
<i>The space in the workplace is well ventilated</i>	64%
<i>I have influence over how my workplace looks</i>	63%
<i>I am involved in environmental activities organized by my company</i>	49%
<i>The temperature in the workplace is often inappropriate - I'm too cold or too hot</i>	48%
<i>My company reliably informs employees about its environmental activities</i>	47%
<i>Segregation of waste in the workplace doesn't do anything, garbage ends up in the wrong bins anyway</i>	37%
<i>My company provides workshops and training on how we can reduce our negative impact on the environment</i>	33%

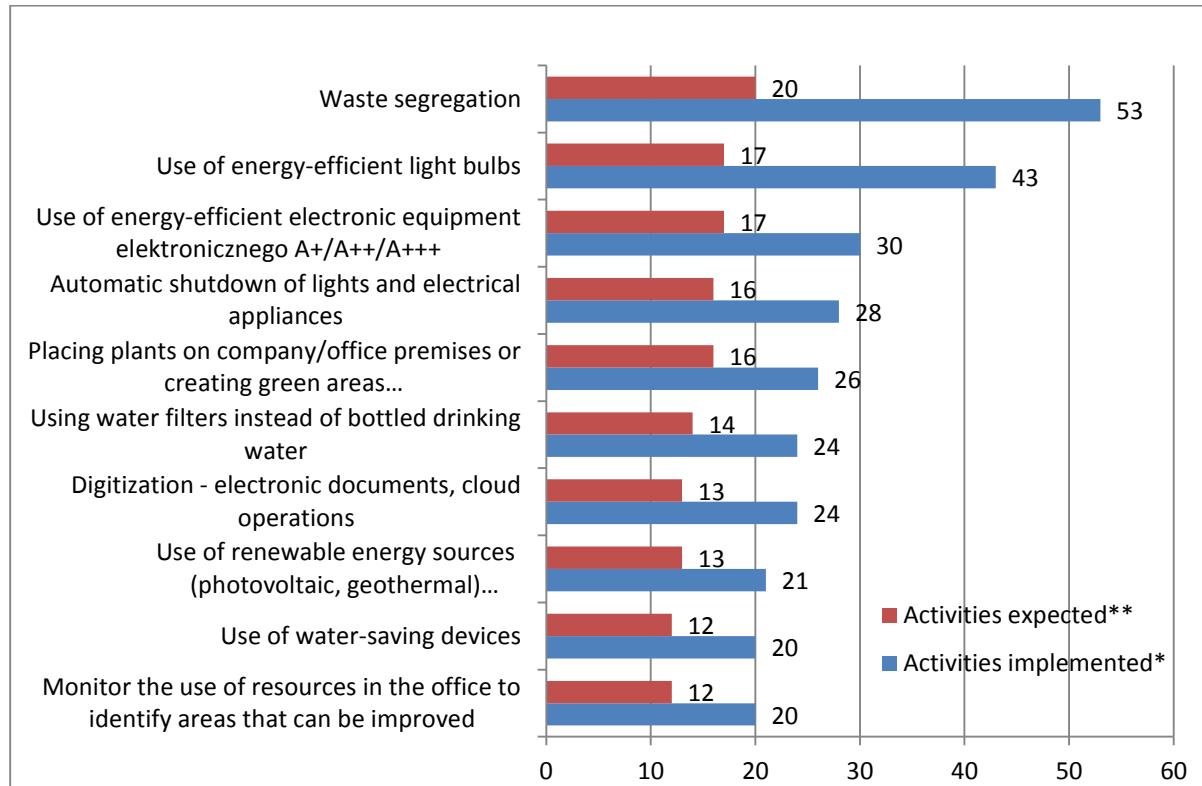
* Sum of responses: "rather and strongly agree".

Source: EKObarometr 2024, p. 57.

The majority of respondents have a positive view of the quality, safety and convenience of their workplace and state that they have an impact on it. Almost half of the employees surveyed are involved in environmental activities organized by their company. Some 47% admit that their company reliably informs employees about environmental activities. However, only 33% of those surveyed state that their employer organizes workshops and training on how we can reduce our negative impact on the environment.

² A multiple-choice question asked of those who say their company is taking steps to go green and care for the environment.

Surveyed employees and managers were asked what green measures the company is implementing, and which are expected by employees. These were multiple-choice questions, with the possibility of indicating up to three answers. The results obtained are presented in Figure 4.



*Data in %; N = 839

**Data in %; N = 1064.

Figure 4. What ecological activities are companies introducing, and what do employees expect?

Source: Own work based on: EKObarometr 2024, pp. 52-54.

As can be seen, for the most part, the measures implemented by the company are also measures expected by employees. Among the essential ones are segregation of waste, use of energy-saving appliances and light bulbs, automatic switching off of lights and electrical appliances.

The surveyed employees indicated the following benefits to themselves from the fact that their company is undertaking environmental activities: improved well-being in the workplace (41%), better working conditions (38%), greater employee awareness of ecology and environmental protection (36%), greater employee motivation and involvement (27%) and others. (EKObarometr 2024, p. 56)

Respondents evaluated the dimension of selected environmental activities undertaken by companies. The question was asked only of owners/board members/council members or directors/high-level managers. The opinions obtained are shown in Figure 5.

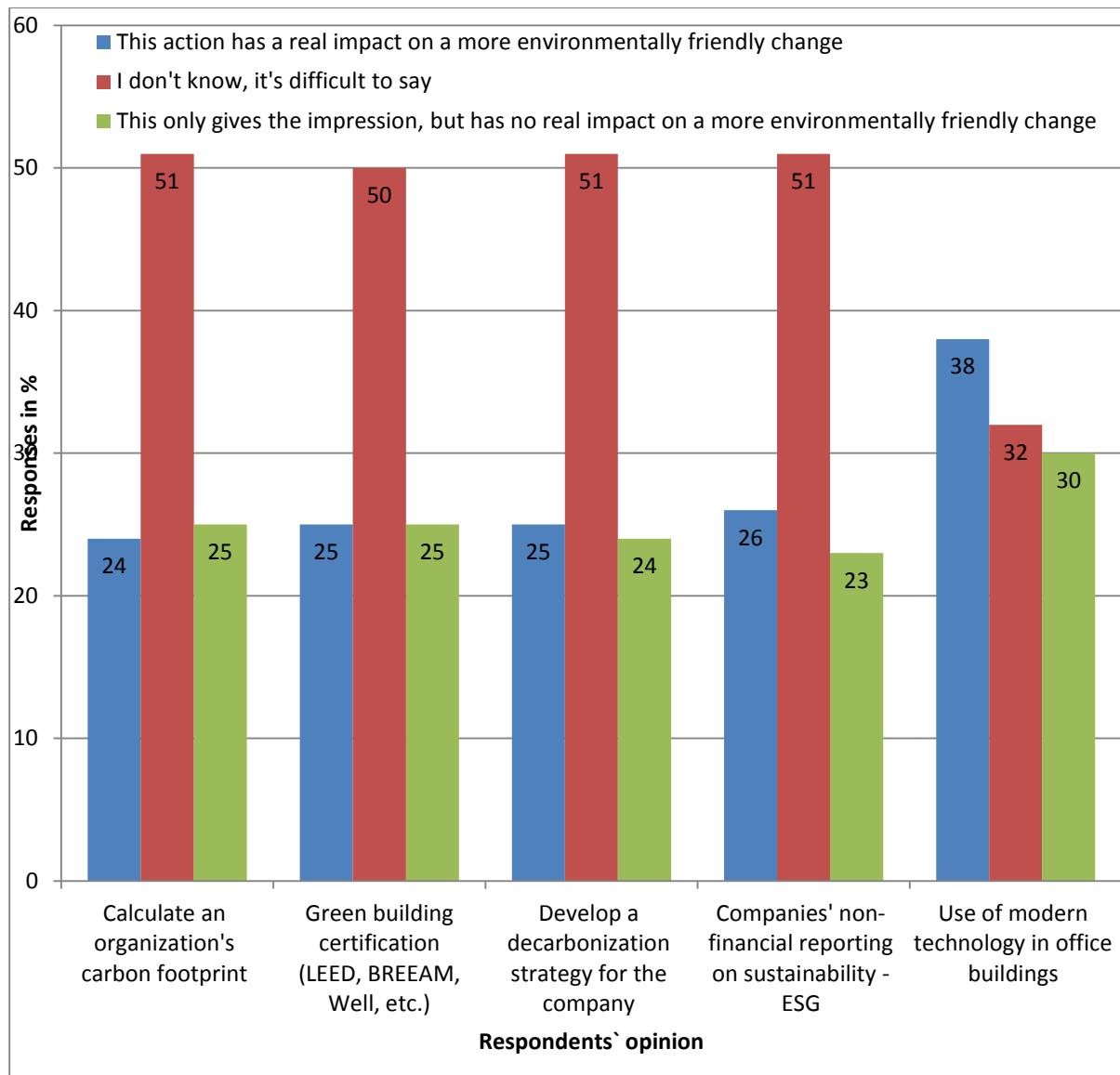


Figure 4. Evaluation of selected environmental initiatives among managers (answers in %).

Source: Own work based on: EKObarometr 2024, pp. 52-54.

Only in the case of the use of modern technology in buildings were there the most responses (38%) that this activity has a real impact on a more environmentally friendly change. Another 30% of respondents believe that this only gives the impression of a real impact, and 32% have no opinion on the subject. With regard to the other activities indicated, “don't know, it's hard to say” had the highest number of responses (more than 50%), and there were almost equal numbers of positive and skeptical responses each.

For employees, the employer's environmental activities are very important. Nearly 60% of surveyed employees would like their employer to do more in the area of workplace ecology (Table 4).

Table 4.
Evaluation of the employer's environmental activities

Statements	Answers (%) [*]
<i>My employer could do more when it comes to environmentally friendly measures in the workplace</i>	59
<i>I would like my workplace to be more environmentally friendly</i>	55
<i>I would like more information to reach me about environmentally friendly measures taken in our workplace</i>	54
<i>In my company, raising environmental awareness among employees is important</i>	49
<i>The quality of the workplace was an important factor that led me to work at my current location</i>	44
<i>In my opinion, my employer does not care at all about the ecology of the workplace</i>	35

* Sum of responses: "rather and strongly agree".

Source: *EKObarometr 2024*, p. 59.

More than half of the respondents would like their workplace to be more environmentally friendly and to receive more information about their company's environmental efforts. The quality of the workplace is also an important motivator for taking a job at a particular company for 44% of respondents. According to a third of respondents, their employer does not care at all about the ecology of their company.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The analyses carried out made it possible to answer the formulated research questions. The surveyed employees are not very positive about their company's involvement in environmental activities. More than 20% of them declare that their company does not undertake any activities in this regard, and the rest mostly believe that their companies only carry out occasional individual activities. Employees expect more management involvement in environmental activities. They believe that much more can be done for a greener workplace, which would positively affect their motivation by increasing job satisfaction, commitment and a sense of belonging to the company.

Similar results were obtained by authors of studies from other countries. Misoska et al., (2023), based on a study in Macedonian companies also confirmed the positive impact of management on employees' pro-environmental attitudes and behavior. The results showed that a company's pro-environmental approach can create incentives and motivations with regard to employees' personal involvement in environmental initiatives and behaving in a more sustainable manner. Also, a study in the energy sector in Italy (Carbone et al., 2024) found a positive direct relationship between supervisors' green commitment and organizational support and employees' pro-environmental behavior in the workplace.

It turns out that also very important is the influence not only of direct supervisors and middle managers, but also of top management. This was demonstrated, among others, by the authors of a study conducted among hotel employees in Vietnam (Hoang et al., 2025), in the hospitality industry in China (Ye et al., 2023), as well as a study on the impact of leadership on employees' green behavior (Mi et al., 2024). The results show that top managers' involvement in green activities has a significant direct and indirect impact on employees' green performance by strengthening their green passion and commitment. Haldorai, Kim, and Garcia (2022) view top management's green commitment as an intangible, strategic corporate resource because their green commitment is rare, valuable, and difficult to imitate.

Surveyed Polish employees also indicate that they would like to receive more information about the company's environmental and social activities. It turns out that communication in this regard is a very important motivational factor. LaVan, Zilic and Basappa (2022) showed in their study that employees of green companies value efficient CSR communication, especially regarding environmental initiatives. They perceive their employer's actions in this regard as a positive aspect of their work, fostering greater job satisfaction, involvement in these activities and a stronger sense of belonging. Of course, the effectiveness of communication is contingent on its authenticity: the CSR information communicated must be consistent with the company's actual activities.

The surveyed employees also expect more training to improve their environmental skills and knowledge. Such employee expectations are also pointed out by Pham et al. (2020), who state that employees perform green tasks properly if they are well trained. Perceived organizational support is also important. Employees feel more empowered, which increases their motivation and productivity in performing environmental tasks (Paillé and Francoeur, 2022). These are important guidelines for implementing green human resource management (Faisal, 2023).

According to respondents, the majority of Polish companies take green measures guided primarily by purely pragmatic motives, such as financial savings and legal requirements. Only about 26% of companies are motivated by a pure desire to be a green company. Similar results were obtained in a study conducted among Small and Medium-sized Enterprises from the Warmian-Masurian province: (Marks-Bielska et al., 2022). In the first place, the desire to reduce costs (6.51) and legal compulsion (5.68) were cited as motives for implementing environmental activities³.

The research found that managers' attitudes toward implementing more complex green measures tend to be skeptical or neutral. More than half of business owners and executives show low awareness of the real impact of measures such as decarbonization, green building

³ Average scores on a seven-point scale, where: 1 - means definitely not, 2 - no, 3 - rather not, 4 - don't know, have no opinion, 5 - rather yes, 6 - yes, 7 - definitely yes.

certification or ESG reporting on meaningful green change. This is likely due to the fact that, as company managers, they see these investments primarily as costs and investment risks.

The results of the EKObarometer 2024 survey show a growing environmental awareness and willingness to participate in their companies' environmental initiatives among Polish employees. In contrast, managers' awareness and involvement appear to be lower. Employees believe that their companies could do much more in terms of ecology. The implication is that it would be necessary to educate not only employees, but especially the management of Polish companies on this issue. It would also be necessary to promote and support companies' efforts in this regard, which is a major challenge for the government and public institutions.

The conclusions presented in the article can be particularly useful for managers, especially Human Resource Management (HRM) managers, in deciding on planned environmental activities. Proper motivation and involvement of employees is of great importance here. This, however, requires the organization of training and workshops and better communication with employees. This can also be a guideline for the government and public institutions on what initiatives and forms of support to propose in order to increase the commitment to ecology and sustainability not only of employees, but also of managers.

Limitations of this study include: relying only on secondary data analysis, being limited to studies in one country.

In terms of directions for further research, it would be important to: identify perceptions of a company's greenness by industry, size, location, etc., conduct international comparisons, study the impact of a company's greenness on economic and financial performance (rate of return on green investments and innovations).

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