The climate emergency across business, community and campaign groups: Motivations and barriers to driving change for the common good

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Abstract: Initiatives to help tackle the climate emergency have tended to focus on large-scale actions that governments can take and smaller-scale actions for individuals, with relatively limited attention given to the mass of groups that form society between these two ends of the spectrum. The aim here is to help close that gap and the chosen areas of study are business, community, and campaign groups. The approach was to assess the existing literature and to conduct three focus groups to identify what motivates these groups to take actions on climate change, while also uncovering the barriers that may drive choices of inaction. The findings indicate that multiple factors motivate environmental engagements across business, community, and campaign groups, but personal ethics and concern for the future play the most vital roles. The most common barriers cited were difficulties in accessing support schemes, a lack of clear accessible information, and financial implications. Better networking and knowledge exchange are considered essential for meaningful progress. This research provides a new framework, upon which many organisations can be better motivated to take actions in helping deal with the global climate emergency facing humanity. Practical action guides may be developed from existing materials, and small taskforces could be trained to provide direct hands-on support to groups across society, especially those in SMEs and local communities. The energies of younger people and campaigners, combined with the experiences of other generations, would create a powerful force for good.

Keywords: Climate; Motivations; Barriers; Business; Community; Campaign.

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Introduction

There is widespread acceptance that the human race faces a climate emergency and there has been a focus in the UK on large-scale actions that government can take and smaller-scale actions for individuals. However, relatively limited attention is given to the mass of groups that form society between these two ends of the spectrum. This includes business, community and campaign groups, and it is these that focus this research. This study aims to identify what motivates groups such as these to act on climate change while also identifying what drives the choice of inaction.

Many people want to see actions on the climate emergency and would like to impact beyond their individual contribution. This study aims to better understand the role and importance of group-level actions and bottom-up initiatives in addressing the climate emergency. It also aims to identify factors that drive groups to act on the climate emergency, as well as those that do the opposite. Interdisciplinary literature reviews were completed to assess existing knowledge and focus groups were used to explore motivations for climate action across business, community and campaign groups. Further progression of the work may include media work and interviews with stakeholders such as local council representatives, business associations, campaigners and other groups.

The potential impact of the study is in raising awareness about the key drivers for climate action, influencing policy and organisational practices, and co-creating knowledge through cross-sectoral exchange and engagement across private, public and not-for-profit sectors. The aim is to convert key elements of the work into short, clear, easily digestible visual images with simple messages about the options available to drive actions on the climate emergency. Both digital and analogue means would be used to promote key messages. This supports the delivery of the UK climate change strategy, and establishes a foundation for further impactful interdisciplinary activities to continue informing groups across society, as well as supporting teaching and research endeavours in higher education.

Literature

The initial focus is on what motivates individuals and groups generally, before more detailed appraisals of the motivations for business, community and campaign groups.

Motivations for individuals and groups generally
Motivation is a set of processes that helps complete goal-directed behaviours and, without motivational resources such as effort, tasks may not be completed. Motivation is not limited to humans (Oemisch *et al.*, 2016; Rygula *et al.*, 2015; Stavrinoudis and Kakarougkas, 2018) but identifying the specific drivers that govern motivation is not always obvious as multiple types of motivation exist. This includes intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, potential motivation, achievement motivation and motivation intensity, while other issues such as emotion add to the complexity (Lang and Bradley, 2010; Harmon-Jones, 2019) and support the notion that fear can lead to environmental inaction (Stern, 2012).

Potential motivation suggests that there is a maximum effort that an individual is willing to exert to achieve a goal. Brehm and Self (1989) proposed that hunger, acquisition of resources, and the perception of a behaviour satisfying a need are all factors that can affect effort levels, as reflected in academic attainment among students (Scales *et al.*, 2020) where students who want to succeed tend to be more motivated to acquire better grades. Achievement motivation considers that positive and negative feelings become associated with goal accomplishment (Miner, 2005) and reinforce the associated behaviours to establish a sense of competitiveness, while motivation intensity signals the level of effort expended by the individual to achieve a goal. Understanding motivation is important for appreciating the psychology that governs behaviour. The more difficult part is influencing behavioural change, as this may require the reframing of perceptions of an issue.

Much of the literature on group motivations is focused on the work or team situation in organisations in the private or public sectors or in sports. This lends itself well to the consideration of a business group, relates in part to the activities of a community group, but is perhaps less directly linked to the

aims of a campaign group except perhaps in the sports aspect of winners and losers. Group motivation is more complicated than individual motivation as individuals differ across the group and therefore the leadership of the group is important in creating a collaborative, structured and communicative environment. Such effective leadership requires a good understanding of the team members, a clear set of goals and a consistency of leadership. In the following sections, it is noted that there are barriers and incentives associated with behaviours linked to the adoption of climate change mitigation strategies by each of the groups studied. Meanwhile, it is worth noting some key differences between the groups:

- In business, each individual in the group is employed and has a defined and remunerated role, the business itself being focused on specific products and services, from which it hopes to generate profits or attract investments, with the aim of continuing to grow through geographic expansion, market share or by diversification.
- Members of a community group are typically local volunteers, each with an interest in the features of that locality. They often bring a range of expertise and experience that may be called upon for different issues. According to its structure and purpose, there may also be a small number of paid administrative employees.
- Campaign groups tend to exist for a relatively short period and the focus is usually on a specific issue about which the members have strong views. The members could be from anywhere and be in touch online more than face-to-face. The structure of the group is also typically evolutionary and less rigid than the other groups.

Given these differences, it may be expected that each group is motivated differently towards a global issue such as the climate emergency and it is this which forms the framework for this research.

Business groups

Most businesses worldwide are small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and, as they are also the largest employers, SMEs form the focus of this study. Important issues concern their access to resources, individual values and issue perceptions, as well as the motivators of and barriers to climate actions.

Access to Resources
Many sudies have demonstrated the importance of relevant funding and support to develop SMEs (Doh and Kim, 2014; Dvoulety *et al.*, 2020; Park *et al.*, 2020) but funders, both private and public, continue to associate their relatively smaller scale with risk and uncertainty (Alvarez *et al.*, 2019; Andries *et al.*, 2018) and this creates a major issue for global issues such as the climate emergency and environmental or sustainability issues more generally (Manzoor *et al.*, 2021; Ghisetti *et al.*, 2017), whose results demonstrated a negative relationship between access to financial support and the incorporation of sustainable practices in business models. Social factors, such as location, ethnicity of managers, and age of business, have also been found to impact resource accessibility (Anderson *et al.*, 2005; Lee and Dreever, 2014). Collaborations between SMEs has been demonstrated to improve sustainability engagement within business communities (Williams and Schaefer, 2013) and this could provide a platform for peer-support in the absence of major funding.

Individual Values
The owners and managers of SMEs have a key role in how to balance the desire for economic growth in the light of sustainability issues such as the climate emergency. Hampton *et al.* (2022) found that the economic arguments tended to be prioritised and that, unless sustainbility practices could be linked to either improved growth or reduced costs (Busch *et al.*, 2020), conflicts often arose between employees based on their personal and professional values. Nevertheless, inaction does not always reflect a lack of interest in environmental engagement (Cassells and Lewis, 2011) and, often, SME managers want to incorporate sustainability into their business models but do not have the resources to do so.

Perceptions of climate change
How climate change is perceived is likely to impact upon any actions taken. If SMEs perceive actions to be costly or its impact only limited, then hesitancy can be expected but it is also important that SMEs do not feel that the issue is so large that there is nothing that they can do about it. Therefore, the sharing of climate action plans can be an effective method for communicating ideas and approaches

that could both enhance growth and save costs (North and Nurse, 2014; Harries *et al.*, 2018; Mayer and Smith, 2019; Kaesehage *et al.*, 2014). If the challenge of the climate emergency is framed in a way that communicates mitigable danger, it is likely that more SMEs would be inclined to engage in suitable practices. Although major corporations nearly all prominently highlight some form of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in their business models, SMEs need to focus more explicitly on understanding issues from a financial perspective and as a potential business opportunity to reduce costs and mitigate impact on the environment (Wright and Nyberg, 2017). Indeed, Allen and Craig (2016) argue that the R of CSR should stand for Responsiveness, as it would focus on actions rather than rhetoric.

Motivators and barriers
Limited access to resources, ranges of individual values and climate change perceptions form the basis of the key motivators and barriers to actions on the climate emergency in business groups, particularly SMEs. Access to resources is the greatest barrier towards sustainable development generally, due to factors such as investment risks, uncertainty with payoffs, and a lack of implementation funding. To incentise actions, the nature of the communication of the climate emergency is critical, as is establsihing support networks and digestible, actionable guidance on what to do next (Petts, 2017; Attari *et al.*, 2009; Wakabayashi and Arimura, 2016; Pickernell *et al.*, 2013; Bennett and Ramsden, 2007).

Community groups
Although limited academic literature exists on the motivational factors for community groups, there is ample evidence in examples of community actions across the UK and internationally. Many focus on the broader picture of sustainability education and activity rather than the specifics of climate, although climate-related issues are high-profile in developing countries and among indigenous communities. In the developed world, pockets of community sustainabilty do exist, such as in Japan, where the Satoyama philosophy of sustainable co-existence forms the platform for communities to work with local authorities in maintaining spaces (Takeuchi, 2010). Several climate-related initiatives undertaken internationally, nationally in the UK and locally by UK County Councils, provide many insights.

At international and national levels
Many nations have set specific, though often non-binding, goals for carbon dioxide emissions in response to international organisations such as the 2015 United Nations Paris Agreement and the Glasgow Climate Pact from COP26, where close to 200 countries agreed to substantially reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to limit the global temperature increase in this century to 2 degrees Celsius while pursuing efforts to limit the increase even further to 1.5 degrees, to review countries' commitments every five years, and to provide financing to developing countries to mitigate climate change, strengthen resilience and enhance abilities to adapt to climate impacts. Prior to these, the UK introduced the Climate Change Act 2008 and supplemented it in 2019 with a legally binding target to achieve net zero gas emissions across the UK economy by 2050.

Locally across the UK
To illustrate climate actions, the following provides examples of specific climate emergency initiatives underway across the UK, such activities typically housed under a broader sustainability umbrella.Kent County Council reflect the climate emergency in their mission statement and set up a framework of a Energy and Low Emissions Strategy with a focus on a target of net zero emissions by 2050 for Kent and Medway. This includes actions to cut greenhouse gas emissions through changes to its highway lighting, council buildings, transport fleet and business travel, as well as planting trees. Devon County Council is working towards a net zero carbon plan that includes local councils as well as community groups, with a series of groups and task forces set up to take the lead, including academic, environmental and health agencies, as well as economic representatives, who also deliver community workshops on tackling the climate emergency using animations, poems, illustrations, mobile games, public murals and augmented reality commissions. North Yorkshire County Council's climate manifesto refers to community actions and seeks overall to become net-neutral by 2030 by working closely with district councils and communities to encourage residents to take action to reduce their carbon footprints. The Council also provides community members with the education needed to support their action plan, including a glossary of the meaning of relevant terms and a variety of activities to educate young people on climate issues and how they can make a difference. This comes complete

with a mascot named '*Power Down Pete*' to encourage young people to take part in climate action, and it provides schools with information and activities to run for students, as well as sets out an initiative that the schools can follow to become greener. In addition, the Council is engaged with partners in York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnerships to develop, implement, and support projects that will assist others to significantly reduce their carbon footprints and/or have other positive environmental impacts. Nottingham County Council declared a climate emergency in 2021 and is working towards becoming carbon neutral in 2030. The plan includes involving the community and over 12,000 members of the public responded to a survey about the priorities. Others too have been particularly active in climate emergency endeavours, including Somerset City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, Suffolk County Council and Hampshire County Council.

Community funding is an important factor and two funds appear to have a notable impact on climate emergency actions: The National Lottery Climate Action Fund and the WWF Community Climate Action fund. Initiatives include support for the organisation of community climate awareness events, discussions and creative workshops to educate the community on climate actions and to promote actions on issues such as transport, heating and beyond.

Challenges
While governments are responsible for upholding the Paris Agreement and setting policies and regulations at national levels, the direct link with local communities is lacking even though many Councils do engage communities to an extent. Only a few first-hand accounts exist of community groups engaging directly with local and national government in the UK. There appears to be a gap between the rhetoric and action on the climate emergency (Howarth *et al.*, 2020), it being described as a 'slow emergency', in part due to mixed messages coming through at local levels and a lack of resource, skill, and capacity to deliver meaningful responses to major emergencies (McHugh *et al.*, 2021; Galaz *et al.*, 2017; Nohrstedt *et al.*, 2021). It appears that, if community members were educated and informed on where best to find advice on climate emergency actions, communities could make a much bigger impact and community participation and involvement in climate action and sustainability would be enhanced. The UN itself has much information available on climate action and how communities can engage in it successfully. This includes Youth in Action, listing actions that young people can engage in to become more active in combating the climate crisis, including calculating your carbon footprint, joining up with like-minded perers, online courses about climate, and onward communications through social media. The existing evidence suggests that climate emergency issues require even greater prioriotisation by national governments, as reflected in their policies and funding streams, to effect real leadership for community climate actions (Howarth *et al.*, 2020).

Campaign groups
Campaign groups may be considered a group of people who share common interests, self-awareness and culture to engage authorities in discussions that would lead to a change (Corry and Reiner, 2021). Nevertheless, in popular culture, campaign groups are often described as activists who lead various protests to thrawt initiatives that they do not want either locally (Schwenkenbecher, 2017) or further afield, as reflected in the recent 'Just Stop Oil' campaign of direct action against UK oil infrastructure such as petrol stations, oil depots and refineries (Gayle, 2022). Such campaign groups often shown unity by moving, singing, chanting and marching together in ranks. Many have also displayed commitment to a cause by carrying our protests in bad weather and risking job deployment, state benefits and redundancy (Delina and Diesendorf, 2016), while others are willing to risk arrest (Wainwright, 2006). Such a range of campaigns may be categorised according to three overarching perspectives: Not in my back yard; Place protection; and Social movement.

Not in my back yard, NIMBY
NIMBY concerns local protesters who oppose infrastructure projects in their vicinity in a bid to preserve the integrity of the area. NIMBY campaigns are aimed first at preventing unwanted projects from progressing (Schwenkenbecher, 2017) and the term was first used in the UK in the mid-1970s to oppose the construction of nuclear power stations, having earlier emerged in the United States (Kinder, 2016) based on the initiative of an American Nuclear Society member (Burningham et al., 2006). NIMBY ideology suggests that, while its members may be positive towards an innovation, such

as new housing or wind turbines for example, they object to it being sited where they are (O'Hare,1977). Many homeowners fear negative impacts on property values and forms of protest include billboards in gardens throughout neighbourhoods across London (Larsen, 2008). NIMBY groups are often criticised for irrationality and for using incomplete or wrong information (Perkins and Mihaylov, 2015). Devine-Wright (2009) proposes that the knowledge gap could be bridged through increased awareness campaigns about the positive impacts of new infrastructure in the community, but acknowledges how self-interest often overpowers even weightier matters such as justice (Devine-Wright, 2009). However, some campaigns become tainted if they are associated with the term NIMBY (Burningham *et al.*, 2006; Walsh *et al.*, 1993), campaigners feeling that they would have made more progress if had dissociated themselves from NIMBY and focused on the preservation of environmental and social values rather than perceptions of personal interest. Burningham et al. (2006) reveal that many movements are in opposition to the siting of social facilities, such as prisons or mental care homes, or potential noise polluters such as airports.

Place protection
Place protective action is a form of NIMBYism in the UK and has been linked to strong attachments to traditional ways of housing, including rural and countryside lifestyles. Residents often oppose new infrastructure developments for reasons such as loss of green space, erosion of area character, undesirable influx of outsiders into local communities, disruptions to the usual way of life, reduced access to schools, health centres, parks and other local amenities, and increased traffic on the roads (Devine-Wright, 2009; Powe and Trevor, 2011). The more attached residents feel to an area, the more the tendency to oppose a project in their community to protect the sanctity or serenity of the locality (Astor, 2016). Place protective behaviours usually suffice when the status quo or peace of a community is threatened, as that reminds residents of the history of the place, the emotional attachments, and the memories shared, leading to protests, campaigns and petitions (Anton, 2016). Place protective approaches may also be linked to social acceptance which can be split into social-political, community and market acceptances. Social-political acceptance concerns key stakeholders and policy makers, often raising awareness through opinion polls. Community acceptance refers to the acceptance of, for example, new renewable energy projects by local residents and authorities. Market acceptance covers the adaptation of consumers to an innovation, an example being residents switching to renewable energy sources without taking part in its generation.

Social movements
Social movements could be defined as a form of collective organised activities designed to influence the political atmosphere (Jamison, 2010) around issues such as climate change. Tilly (2008) argues that protests and social movements are successful when they display worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment. Worthiness refers to the perceived seriousness of the group. Unity refers to the synergy and cooporation within the group, as reflected by local activists forming gatherings, wearing similar colours and coordinated communication. Numbers refers to the size of the campaign group; larger numbers having a greater impact. Commitment refers to how much sacrifice members of the group are willing to support the cause. Climate movements though operate in an atmosphere of uncertainty and movement leaders do not have direct control over climate-related occurrences like oil spills, so policy change may not bring about the global change wanted (Hacker, 2004). The environmental justice movement emerged as a result of the experiences of those in marginalised regions and polluted communities (Perkins and Mihaylov, 2015; Schlosberg, 2004), defining environmental justice in three ways: Equal distribution of environmental risk; Acknowledgment of diversity; and Involvement in the processes that influence environmental policies. UK research (Friends of the Earth, 2022) showed that 66% of hazardous emissions impact the most deprived 10%. Diversity in the context of environmental justice means all form of difference (Simms, 2012). Emerging social movements for environmental justice often form alliances for maximum effect but climate change has such a wide impact that different orientations, backgrounds and motivations make a coordinated approach difficult (Jamison, 2010).

Methodology

Focus groups are commonly used to access the views of under-represented entities (Plaut *et al.*, 1993) and therefore provided the platform for exploring the behaviour of under-researched business, community and campaign groups. The focus group approach offers flexibility, based on the understanding that '*sense making is produced collectively, in the course of social interactions between people*' (Wilkinson, 1998) and, as the research aims to examine how groups work collectively to engage on environmental issues, this method helps study group dynamics and behaviour. Focus groups also gather information in a relatively short space of time, useful given the urgency of the topic, while the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic limitations drove the decision to hold them online.

Participants were selected using convenience and purposive sampling. The campaign participants were predominantly selected due to an existing relationship with one of the principal researchers. The business and community participants were targeted due to their suitability for the project as outlined below and their geographic location (Kent and South-East UK):
- 'Business group' covers businesses with less than 250 employees, commonly refered to as a SME (Small & Medium Enterprise).
- 'Community group' includes groups of people with a common interest who would likely identify or describe themselves as a community group.
- 'Campaign group' is defined as a group actively campaigning on a particular issue. Here, due to the self-selecting nature of the participants, all were involved in environmental work.

Around 200 potential participants were contacted (68 business, 100 community and 32 campaign) initially by email, with around a third being contacted with follow up phone calls. From this, 23 participants confirmed and, of the 23 who confirmed, 17 attended the sessions (6 community, 5 business and 6 campaign). A small incentive ot a £15 voucher was offered to all participants. Originally, larger groups of 8-10 participants were envisaged but timetables did not ultimately allow for this. For example, many local businesses indicated that the summer was the busiest time of year and staff could not be spared. In retrospect, it may have been more effective to contact prospective participants by phone rather than email. That being said, the groups created worked very well within the time frame of 1.5 hours per session with each participant being able to fully express opinions and interact.

All participants signed a consent form prior to the session and completed a short information questionnaire to establish preferred names and identify any access requirements. Based on the project aim to determine the motivations and barriers to climate emergency action, a list of questions (Appendix 1) was formulated prior to the focus groups. The questions were structured to ensure that the key aims of the research were addressed but allowed the flexibility for free-flowing conversation. In line with Krueger (1997) recommendations, questions were asked in a conversational manager consistent with characterisations of the focus group as a '*social experience*' The focus groups ran on the following dates in July 2022: Business 11th; Community 12th; and Campaign 15th. The transcription of the focus group output was completed by an external professional and a research assistant.

A thematic analysis of the focus groups' output was conducted using NVivo, while both NVivo and Excel were used to generate visualisations of the qualitative data. As Braun and Clarke (2006) argue, thematic analysis is a useful method for highlighting key themes in a data set, drawing out similarities and differences of opinion between participants, and of generating '*unanticipated insights*'. Software such as NVivo renders the analysis process visible, logical and clearly documented, factors necessary for dependability (Tobin and Begley, 2004). When coding, both deductive and inductive methods were used. As an example, with the aim being to determine motivations and barriers to environmental engagement, questions were used to target these areas. 'Motivations' and 'Barriers' were designated as codes and all responses which fell into this category were coded as such. Sub-themes were then added to these main codes as they emerged, an example being types of barriers such as 'access to opportunities.' Main codes were added as they emerged throughout the coding process (Appendix 2).

Findings

The focus group findings are considered here in light of each groups' actions, motivations, barriers, solutions, and impact.

The business participants came from a range of SMEs in various sectors, including construction, streaming services and accommodation. Community participants were from community centres, religious organisations and a senior social group. Some campaign participants knew each other through environmental group affiliations and their campaigns focused on the natural environment, marine ecology, clean air and local eco-projects. All participants were already actively engaged in various sustainability matters and most were keenly aware of climate change. The sample was self-selecting in this respect and future studies may need to consider those with less direct interest in environmental issues. The participants were 3 males and 14 females from Kent and South East UK, with perceived age range from 30s to 70s.

Although participants were partly guided through having the same questions, the areas focused on differed. Both the community and campaign groups placed emphasis on the future, political considerations and critiques of large corporations. The community group uniquely raised issues of fundraising, ethical practices and gender, while the campaign group introduced topics of collaboration, power and cultural attitudes. The business group discussed a narrower range of themes, reflecting perhaps a greater focus on their own sectors and their relatively more structured status in terms of time, personnel, regulations and remit compared to those in community and campaign groups.

Actions
Business group
Modifying the infrastructure in its buildings was cited as the most common existing action by businesses, and 75% of actions were covered by this and by three other activities; recycling, environmental strategies, and assistance to others associated to their value chain. Examples given included energy-efficient air-conditioning units, utilising LED-lighting, harvesting of rainwater, recycling, using sustainable paper for promotions, collaborating with a local solar farm for electricity, and introducing permaculture priciples into community gardens. Such activities raised awareness both internally and externally.

> '… did a permaculture course … not digging and using heaps of mulch and putting in loads of plants for wildlife. … high street property … getting hedgehogs and….more birds and frogs … local people are noticing ….'

Strategising, and implementing environmental plans was also a strong theme, with participants discussing ideas for showcasing how local businesses were actively engaging in environmental issues, or providing small loans to enable communities to launch environmental projects.

Community group
Promoting and undertaking sustainability and recycling was cited as the most common activity by community groups and 81% of actions were covered by this and by five other actions; forming environmental community hubs, helping vulnerable groups tackle such issues, attending to the natural environment, raining awareness, and adopting ethical practices. In some cases, an environmentally-friendly lifestyle was something learned from childhood:

> 'I'm secretary of a retirement group … members … a lot of them in their eighties … we don't have an environmental policy as such, but we come from the generation of make, do, reuse, mend … we're probably the original eco warriors.'

Others set up repair cafes, ran sustainability workshops, educated, organised food banks, and taught vulnerable people how to cook healthily on a budget. Participants were highly socially aware and protective of others. Poverty and costs were frequently mentioned, and workshops often targeted this issuey. Many themes overlap, and community work and everyday behaviour were seen as integrated.

Campaign group
The most common action of campaign groups was in raising awareness, and 74% of activities were covered by this and by two other activities; campaigning about environmental issues, and associated political actions. Raising awareness and campaigning overlapped, with participants describing campaigns to raise awareness about vehicle pollution, protecting natural habitats and marine conservation. Participants also discussed petitions and organising with communities and political groups. Political engagement included local politics and the Green Party, lobbying government and councils, and attending local council meetings. Many emphasised the importance of social media:

> *'… social media is very important … influencing the influencers … it's finding those people and getting them on side and getting them to raise awareness on social media as well.'*

Surprisingly perhaps, fundraising was not mentioned by the group, with one campaigner explaining:

> *'… they had been very lucky in terms of raising money …'*

Overall
In asking participants to describe their actions, the results fell into a wide range of categories, each group having its own areas of focus. The most common forms of engagement overall (73%) fell broadly into seven categories or themes: Education/promoting awareness (cited 17 times); Sustainability and recycling programmes (16); Care of the surrounding natural environment (12); Campaigning (11); Forming a community hub (11); Improving physical infrastructure, usually in energy inefficient buildings (11); and Political engagement at local or national levels (10).

Motivations
Business group
Personal ethics was cited as the principal driver for action and this and two other issues (regulations, and increased public engagement) accounted for 83% of motivations. This corresponds to the work by Williams and Shaeffer (2013) where personal senses of responsibility were essential in motivating small business owners towards climate actions. Personal values were often integrated into business practices:

> *'On a personal level….we do it as much as we can at home … it just makes sense to us to do it as a business.'*
> *'… always linked it to ethics … business being a force, it's a cliche, but a force for good … being able to do things in a way that I think is right and have hope in the future and have a sense of agency and self-determination. All of those things are what motivates me.'*
> *'… for me, it's obviously wanting to lead by example … I guess I'm aware people look around at what everyone else is doing … important to be aware of that … and the responsibility that comes with it.'*

On regulations, participants in construction and housing were well aware of government and global pledges regarding net zero carbon and these aims often corresponded with the ethics of small business:

> *'… in the construction industry … how we can reduce or create net zero carbon buildings … whether that's building new ones … or rather going down a refurbishment route … that's one of the main drivers for us … we want to do it as a business, but the industry's also requiring it from us.'*

Community group
In the community group, motivations were broader and five issues covered 71% of responses; generational impacts had the lead role with influences from both senior members and inspirations from younger members of the community:

> *'… younger people being more kind of tuned in to all of this because I think our younger members, sort of in their twenties and thirties, were really kind of cheerleading for the environment strategy and were really wanting to get it off the ground so that was definitely a motivation in terms of us.'*

The other four main themes covered having environmental policies as a funding condition, the sheer cost of living unsustainably, personal ethics, and the influence of a parent organisation. The cost issue also impacted on the types of engagement, with one community group running a repair café to encourage a sustainable and economical lifestyle. There was an overall strong sense of social inequalities having a bearing on the climate emergency:

> *'… so many issues that run parallel to it … being responsible about the way you use stuff … more of a sense of equality that we can't just take, take, take and not, you know, not have to take responsibility for that in terms of what the implication are, how that impacts on other people.'*

Participants were highly cognisant of the urgency of climate issues:
> *'It's a scary, scary thing … just terrifying.'*

Campaign group
Protecting the future of the planet emerged as the strongest motivating factor and 74% of responses were covered by this and by education/awareness and urgency. Several respondents mentioned the importance of preserving the environment for their children or grandchildren:
> *'… key one was my grandchildren…'*
> *'… grandchildren living very close by … those local actions … could make a difference for that future generation.'*
> *'the fear … what my children will face and the guilt … worst-case scenario is them living in a potentially war zone situation.'*

There was a particularly powerful sense of the urgency and scale of the current situation in this group. Participants also discussed how greater awareness and education had prompted them to take action, with some mentioning popular films and news outlets:
> *'… watching Don't Look Up a few weeks back on Netflix … then seeing an interview on GB News about the heat coming on Monday … that's why I get involved in any local campaign.'*

Others mentioned being influenced by experts or social media and noted the importance of social media in environmental campaigns and activism. Participants felt a strong ethical obligation to engage with environmental issues, as well as frustration at government inaction, dominant political systems, and corporate greed. There was also a firm sense of environmental action being part of the fight for social equality. Political change was viewed as key to tackling the environment and to improving living standards for the most vulnerable.

Overall
A diverse set of factors are motivating environmental engagement by these groups with personal ethics and concern for the future playing the most vital roles.

Barriers
Business group
For businesses, accessing opportunities was cited as the single greatest barrier (33%) to engagement and, together with three other factors (information, cost, and technology), these four accounted for 73% of the barriers. Opportunities covered environmentally-orientated schemes that offer funding and advice and there were frequent complaints about bureaucracy, complicated and contradictory information, the time and skills needed to complete applications, issues with partial funding, and difficulties qualifying for support. All spoke of frustrating experiences:
> *'… filled out a form … they said all right, let's have a meeting … what you're asking for, we don't give … why are we having a meeting then? … just a bit odd.'*
> *'one of the shocking things really is just how focused it [government support] is on the big industries, huge organisations, councils and trade associations.'*
> *'Government tends to think in hundreds of millions … when you start to say things like … a project …£90,000 of funding, they just think that's pathetic … there's a mindset that needs to change, but I do know that it is changing.'*

Even when SMEs were eligible for support, those who engaged found that applications often generated significant administration that exceeded the capacity of small teams:
> *'… it's like a minefield, trying to find the actual tools to help you get all the reporting and everything done. That's really difficult for small SMEs.'*
> *'… there's a lot of, they make it sound easy, but there's a lot of barriers and forms and stuff that you have to jump or get through before you actually get to speak to someone, which I think is really difficult.'*

Other challenges unique to small businesses included their scale, as reflected in an independent entertainment venue being unable to source sustainable refreshments at an affordable price because of the need to bulk-buy, requiring excessive storage capacity.

Another strong theme was that of information; namely, the difficulty accessing clear, relevant, unbiased and targeted information regarding sustainable practices and support:

> '… everyone's just expected to know this information … there are about 150 websites … and they're not consistent … hard to know which ones are legitimate … (or) driving a particular message because it suits their organisation … very hard to find the actual accurate information that is unbiased …'
>
> '… lack of tangible information and the fact that SMEs have not got time to go and sort it out … really confusing to have to find out what would be the best measure.'

Additional strong themes which emerged were cost, lack of effective and easily-available technology such as cost-effective solar panels, feelings of burn out, and issues around gender and the feminisation of environmental discourse:

> 'flaky and fluffy… all a bit emotional … not seen as proper business,'

Indeed, all attendees in the business focus group were female and, yet, males still occupy most positions of power in business, this chiming with Richards *et al.* (2014) who found that ethics, or concerns for the environment, were characterised as feminised behaviour in a business context.

Community group

For community groups, seven issues covered 78% of the barriers; cost, accessing clear information, issue avoidance, the pandemic, time, corporations, and physical infrastrucure. On costs, participants discussed the difficulties with funding sustainable improvements for community buildings, the prohibitive cost of environmentally-friendly alternatives to everyday materials such as bubble wrap and cleaning products, and government cuts on County Councils resulting in reduced bus services in some areas. Environmentally friendly products are for many people a luxury:

> 'If you're in the nice position of being able to afford it then you do. But if you're not, then you can't and you feel so angry …'

Community participants felt strongly that information was not clear, and eco-schemes were not well promoted by many bodies nationally or locally:

> '… lot of environmental projects going on … not an awful lot of publicity about them … people, if they knew what was going on, they would be a lot more interested … whether it's through Facebook, the local paper… encourage people to come and see and then maybe they might get involved …'
>
> '… don't really see anybody like government scientists or … Greenpeace or someone from one of the big international campaigning groups … not making the case strongly enough now.'

Interestingly, the community group were the only group to mention the pandemic and its aftermath, which they felt was a significant barrier to engagement because of the disruptive impact of a two-year hiatus in operations and activities and difficulties convincing people to return. For one participant, who organises a senior social club, the pandemic had caused something of a re-evaluation of life priorities:

> '… our generation … they've maybe lost their fight … lost two years of their life … if another Covid comes along, you know, we don't want to look back and say, I wish we'd done that … things like the environment … now take second or third or even fourth place … We haven't lived for two years.'

Finally, there was considerable frustration with the failure of large corporations and nation states globally to properly engage with net zero targets and related activities. Issues ranged from the packaging used by Amazon, to unclear governmental environmental policy, to decisions to relocate popular supermarkets out of town. These issues merged into a political theme and senses of powerlessness when faced with emissions from countries such as China and the United States.

Campaign group
For the campaign group, the mostly commonly discussed barriers to engagement were related to politics. There was a great deal of anger and frustration with successive Conservative governments, associated environmental policy, and wider structures of capitalism and consumerism, describing them as primary drivers of the climate emergency:

> '… none of these Conservative blasted mini-Borises are even mentioning the Chatham House warnings on the climate crisis … ignoring it … letting 67 million UK people and the rest of the world down.'
> '… raised to be consumers not citizens …'

Across the board, there was a sense that current political structures, including the UK voting system, was antithetical to meaningful change:

> 'What does that say for our society if we don't make those changes now and we don't have that political will and a system that stops any Green voice getting anywhere near power because we're first past the post and not proportional representation?'

Indeed, the political system and culture was seen as a major cause of voter apathy, disengagement and low turnout. Overlapping this was a strong sense that social inequality was directly related to climate change and to a culture of greed and class division in the UK:

> '… MPs that are worth hundreds of millions of pounds making our decisions for people that are on hardly any money at all, and they're being told to not have Netflix.'

The current government, structures of capitalism and consumer culture were all seen as interconnected with many of the additional barriers mentioned, including self-interest, the distribution of power, and unhelpful media representations. Unsurprisingly, burn out and frustration emerged as a fairly strong theme, overlapping with a lack of resources such as time and personnel:

> '… you start a group with six or ten people … end up with two or three really doing it … then it boils down to two … one day you say, I just can't do this anymore … It's taken over my whole life …'

Finally, some participants felt that lacks of communication and networking opportunities between campaign groups were significant issues, resulting in a tendency to reinvent-the-wheel:

> 'I'm interested to find other communities who have successfully taken on bus companies to address local pollution … What were the keys to their success? … it's really difficult to actually find them.'

Overall
Though variations exist across the groups, the most common barriers cited were difficulties in accessing opportunities and support schemes, a lack of clear and accessible information, and financial resources/costs.

Solutions
All groups were asked what changes would most help them achieve their environmental goals. Both the business and community groups felt specialist support and advice would be a significant aid. In the business group, one participant felt strongly that local government should offer businesses free audits to help them and to understand the regulations and opportunities available. Meanwhile, community participants spoke about specialist champions or experts who could help advise, coordinate and provide administrative support. This overlapped with the theme of personnel and, for campaign and community groups, centred on difficulties convincing people to regularly give their time:

> '… a lot of things do fall down because of no capacity.'

A theme noted by all groups was political change, the campaign group feeling the most strongly that meaningful steps to tackle the climate emergency were contingent on a more proactive government:

> '… so many things that need changing … unless you have a government that's willing to make all those changes, pass laws … we're never going to try to make the real change that we need to achieve carbon zero … political power is extremely important.'

The campaign group felt strongly that greater collaboration between groups was important, a view shared by the business group, who were keen for more environmentally-focused networking opportunities:

> *'It's networking … we are all doing the same thing over and over again from scratch … there's no collaboration, sharing resources … there's a lot of fear that everyone's competing and that if we share information, it will be to our detriment … networking opportunities … would help everyone.'*

Impact

Business and community group participants were also asked whether they felt they were making a positive environmental impact and both felt that they were, although the business group were more likely to describe it as small and incremental change:

> *'… just don't think we have the power to do massive changes, unfortunately.'*

For community participants, being part of a group of like-minded individuals was important to combat feelings of powerlessness and the overall feeling was that positive changes were being made. Both groups believed that change was more likely to occur as a result of group collaboration:

> *'… huge potential to make a difference … I've got to believe that … I wouldn't be bothering else.'*

Due to time constraints, the slightly larger campaign group did not address this issue directly, although it was clear that participants had achieved significant goals within their local areas.

Conclusions

This study highlights areas of both divergence and convergence between societal groups in terms of climate actions and engagement, and in terms of motivations and barriers. SMEs face unique climate emergency challenges which are not necessarily experienced by larger corporations. Similarly, community and campaign groups, though sharing many of the same goals and ethics, also face unique challenges and cite unique motivations for engagement. Regarding accessing funding and opportunities, both campaign and business groups experienced many of the same barriers and challenges. Clearly, all three groups are dynamic and complex, having some shared operational structures, goals and experiences, but each with specific experiences of engaging with the climate emergency.

The self-selected participants tended to be engaged in some form of environmental action, and it was clear that personal ethics played a significant role in terms of motivating engagement. Even within the business group, regulations were cited as secondary to personal ethics as a driver of environmental action. It therefore appears that, while government regulations play an important role in motivating business to engage with environmental issues, this needs to be underpinned by personal engagement and ethics.

Meanwhile, barriers to action were diverse and significant, with participants exhibiting notable frustration that well-intentioned plans were often thwarted by time-consuming bureaucracy. All groups referenced the difficulties in accessing clear, concise and unbiased information. In campaign and community groups especially, there are perceptions that large corporations often operate unethically and that politicians, particularly those in the current Conservative government, are ineffective. Many participants felt that real progress requires a significant change in national politics, with capitalism and/or neoliberalism being the key architects of the climate emergency.

Accessing environmentally targeted support or funding was considered opaque, bureaucratic or poorly communicated, and thus proved a significant barrier to the business and campaign groups. Given that personal ethics was a strong driver of environmentalism for the participants, it may be that lacks of engagement are often driven by lack of interest, personal scepticism or apathy, although further research would be required to ascertain this.

The self-selecting nature of the groups resulted in a gender-skewed sample where 82% of participants were female and this correlates with work by Rickards et al. (2014) who found that environmental

engagement and ethics more generally have become coded as feminine in popular discourse. In contrast, profit-seeking, individualism and materialism are coded as masculine behaviours in business culture and are therefore to some extent incommensurate with environmental engagement. The gender disparity of the groups was acknowledged by two participants from both the business and community groups who were aware of these gendered stereotypes and voiced their frustration with the situation.

Participants across all groups were keen to develop environmental strategies further, to collaborate and network with others and to work towards meaningful change. Although no groups were included in the study who were not committed to eco-friendly strategies, it is clear that a significant will exists among business, community and campaigns groups.

Finally, all groups were clear that, apart from political change, the support or change most likely to aid their engagement with environmental issues centred on resources. This often meant people, in terms specialist advisors, administrators, or simply 'feet on the ground', but also related to time and money. The Covid-19 pandemic was also referenced as a significant issue for community and campaign groups in terms of recruiting members or convincing former members to return, with restarting projects post-lockdown proving difficult due to losses of interest and re-evaluations of life goals. Brexit was also mentioned, specifically in relation to funding and support that had been offered as part of EU projects.

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Appendix 1: Focus group questions

- What is your understanding of the climate emergency (CE)/how well-informed would you say you are in terms of the CE?
- How easy is it to obtain clear, reliable information about climate change?
- How easy is to obtain clear information as to what you can do as a small business/campaign/community group to engage with the climate emergency?
- In what ways, if any, does your business/community/campaign group engage with the climate emergency/environmental issues?
- What motivated you to do this?
- What prevents you from implementing further strategies?
- How easy would you say it is to implement environmentally friendly policies in your business/community/campaign group?
- Is it more or less difficult for smaller businesses to implement environmental policies than for big business? Why/why not?
- Do you think political affiliation affects attitudes towards climate change?
- A question relating to gender? Or something to bear in mind in terms of participant selection and analysis?
- How clear and easy is it to understand information on the climate emergency in the media?
- How urgent do you think climate change is? (risk assessment)
- Do you feel that your business/group/community can make a difference to the climate emergency?
- Do you feel that you have the appropriate systems in place to adapt to/engage with environmental issues?
- In what ways do you think climate change/the climate emergency directly impacts your business? (or not)
- What does your business do already in terms of engaging with environmental issues/what more could you be doing?
- Do you feel there is sufficient support/guidance from the government in terms of making environmental changes to your business?
- Do you see any cost benefits to implementing environmentally friendly policies?
- How important is the environment in short and long term business plans?

Appendix 2: Code Book Nodes

Name	Files	References
Awareness	2	7
Barriers	0	0
Accessing opportunities	2	28
Activism	1	1
Avoidance	2	8

GCWP2202

Brexit	1	2
Burn out frustration	3	12
Communication collaboration	2	5
Corporations	2	6
Cultural	1	8
Gender	2	5
Information	3	23
Media	2	5
Pandemic	1	6
Physical infrastructure	2	8
Political	2	17
Power	1	7
Resources	3	9
Cost	3	19
Specialist Knowledge	1	4
Time	2	12
Self-interest	1	1
Sustainable alternatives	1	2
Technology	3	10
Collaboration	3	15
Engagement	3	44
Assistance	1	4
Awareness education	2	17
Campaigning	2	11
Community Group Hub	2	11
Digital Technology	1	1
Ethical Practices	1	5
Fundraising	1	2
Lifestyle	2	5
Natural Environment	3	12
Physical infrastructure	2	11
Political	1	10
Protest	0	0
Strategies	2	7
Sustainability recycling	3	16
Vulnerable Groups	2	8
Motivations	0	0
Cost	1	3
Education awareness	2	5
Ethics	3	9
External	0	0
Condition of funding	2	4
Customers	1	1
Increased public engagement	2	3
Regulations	1	1
Future	2	7
Generational	1	5
Government Inaction	1	1
Pandemic	1	1
Part of larger organisation	1	2
Social inequality	2	3
Urgency scale	2	5
Perceived Impact	2	12
Support	1	1
Clear guidelines	1	1
Collaboration	2	7

GCWP2202

Financial	2	4
Personnel	2	7
Political change	3	8
Specialist support	2	8