A Review of Literature Studies on Employee Green Behavior

a Maria Sadiq

a PhD scholar, Faculty of Arts and Society, Charles Darwin University, Australia

ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

In light of escalating environmental degradation and growing emphasis on sustainability from both governmental policies and consumer expectations, enterprises are increasingly adopting environmental protection measures and sustainable development strategies. Central to the effectiveness of these initiatives are the enterprise employees, whose green behaviors are pivotal in actualizing organizational environmental goals. This paper critically reviews existing literature to define the concept of employees’ green behavior and explore the multi-level factors influencing it. By synthesizing research findings, the study aims to clarify the role of employee behavior in the success of corporate environmental policies and identifies gaps for future research. This review not only elucidates the conceptual framework of green behavior within the corporate context but also highlights the importance of fostering an environmentally conscious workforce as a key component of sustainable business practices.

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Corresponding author’s email address: mariasadiq66@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Climate change represents one of the most daunting challenges humanity faces today, with global warming at its core demanding urgent and collective action. In December 2019, the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Madrid, Spain, underscored this urgency, placing Australia in a pivotal role to foster global consensus on mitigating climate impacts. Recognizing its responsibility as a major global player, Australia has integrated environmental protection and ecological civilization into its national strategy, reflecting a broader shift towards sustainability. This shift is mirrored in the corporate world, where increased governmental regulation and growing consumer environmental awareness are pressuring organizations to adopt green practices. Such practices are crucial not only for reducing the environmental footprint of business activities but also for achieving economic benefits within a sustainable framework.

Traditionally, organizations have leaned on formal structures, technologies, and programs to implement environmental protection measures. However, the intricate nature of environmental
challenges necessitates a more nuanced approach. As noted in the literature, the success of environmental strategies increasingly hinges on the eco-friendly behaviors of employees, from frontline workers to organizational leaders (Dilchert & Ones 2012). The complexity and variability of environmental issues demand spontaneous and voluntary green behaviors that extend beyond conventional roles (Raineri & Paillé 2016). Thus, the effectiveness of any organization's environmental performance is fundamentally tied to its employees' green behaviors.

This paper aims to delve into the concept of employee green behavior and explore the multifaceted factors influencing it at various levels. Through a comprehensive review of both domestic and international literature, we will outline the current research landscape, identify gaps, and project future directions in the study of green behavior within organizational settings. In doing so, we highlight the indispensable role of individual actions in achieving corporate and, by extension, global environmental goals.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Employee Green Behavior

Understanding the concept of Employee Green Behavior (EGB) is pivotal in the context of organizational environmental responsibility. Scholars define EGB through various lenses, reflecting its broad applicability and significance in enhancing organizational sustainability efforts. This section systematically explores these definitions, underscores the importance of EGB, and delineates the spectrum of green behaviors exhibited by employees in the workplace.

The scholarly discourse around EGB reveals a range of definitions that emphasize different aspects of environmentally responsible behaviors in the workplace. Steg & Vlek (2009) describe EGB in broad terms as the impact of individual employee activities on the natural environment, encompassing both positive and negative effects. In contrast, Saeed et al., (2019) focus on the voluntary nature of such behaviors, highlighting their role in shaping the organization's social image and bolstering environmental performance. Further refining this concept, Norton et al., (2017) define EGB as specific, measurable actions undertaken by employees that relate directly to environmental sustainability and contribute towards preventing environmental degradation.

EGB manifests in various forms within the workplace, ranging from simple acts like turning off lights and using both sides of paper for printing, to more significant efforts such as participating in the organization's green strategies, commuting by bicycle, and minimizing waste. These behaviors demonstrate employees' proactive engagement with environmental sustainability, contributing to the organization's overall environmental goals. Importantly, EGB can be categorized into in-role behaviors, which are mandated by the employee's job duties, and out-of-role behaviors, which are voluntary and go beyond formal job requirements. For example, in-role behaviors might include ensuring the safe disposal of toxic wastes in compliance with organizational policies, while out-of-role behaviors could involve initiatives like conserving electricity by switching off unused appliances.

The distinction between in-role and out-of-role green behaviors is crucial for understanding the full spectrum of EGB. While in-role behaviors are often driven by organizational policies and regulations, out-of-role behaviors are guided by individual initiative and personal commitment to environmental stewardship. Both types of behaviors are essential for achieving comprehensive environmental performance in organizations. Recognizing and fostering out-of-role behaviors, in particular, can significantly enhance an organization's environmental sustainability efforts, as these
behaviors reflect a deeper personal commitment to environmental values.

The literature on EGB highlights the complexity and multifaceted nature of employees' contributions to organizational environmental goals. By examining various definitions and examples of green behaviors, this review underscores the critical role of both in-role and out-of-role behaviors in fostering environmental sustainability within the corporate sector. As organizations strive to enhance their environmental performance, understanding and promoting EGB among employees emerges as a key strategy for achieving sustainable development.

2.2 Factors Affecting Employees' Green Behavior

2.2.1 Organizational-Level Factors

Dumont et al., (2017) highlight the pivotal role of green HRM in promoting employee green behavior. By implementing green HRM practices, including the dissemination of environmental policies, environmental training, and the establishment of formal communication channels, organizations can significantly enhance employees' environmental awareness, knowledge, and motivation. These practices not only demonstrate the organization's commitment to environmental protection but also encourage employees to engage in both in-role and out-of-role green behaviors. However, it is crucial to recognize that the impact of HRM on employee behavior is often mediated through various mechanisms, including the psychological climate within the organization.

The concept of a green psychological climate represents employees' perceptions of their organization's environmental policies and practices. This climate serves as a crucial mediating variable, illustrating how green HRM practices can foster a work environment that supports and encourages green behaviors among employees.

Guerci et al., (2016) explore how external pressures from stakeholders, such as customers and regulators, drive organizations to adopt green HRM practices. These practices, which can include green recruitment, training, engagement, and performance management, mediate the relationship between stakeholder pressures and organizational environmental performance. The study underscores the significant role of customer and regulatory pressures in prompting firms to implement green initiatives as part of their HR strategies, aiming for improved environmental performance and sustainable development.

Delving into the influence of cultural philosophies, Xing, & Starik (2017) examines how traditional Chinese Taoist thought, when integrated into leadership styles, can promote pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors among employees. The study identifies key qualities of Taoist leadership, such as non-action (aligning with natural laws), dialectical thinking (balancing short-term and long-term considerations), and selflessness (extending one's identity to include the natural world), as instrumental in fostering a workplace culture that values and practices environmental stewardship.

2.2.2 Leadership Factors

Leaders play a pivotal role in setting ethical standards in the workplace, guiding employees towards environmentally friendly behaviors. Research indicates that employees are more likely to commit to environmental practices when top management actively supports environmental protection. The influence of leadership on fostering green behaviors among employees can be understood through various theoretical lenses and empirical studies.
Drawing on social learning theory, Priyadarshini et al., (2023) emphasize the importance of leaders as role models. They suggest that employees imitate the behaviors of their leaders, especially those that are rewarded or approved. Ethical leaders, who embody both the roles of ethical individuals and ethical managers, are particularly effective in promoting an ethical climate within the organization. This climate enhances employees' environmental awareness and encourages the adoption of green behaviors.

Graves & Sarkis (2018) explores the concept of environmental transformational leadership, which leverages leadership and motivation theories to explain how leaders can inspire pro-environmental behaviors among employees. By articulating a compelling vision of a sustainable future, providing encouragement, and enhancing employees' self-efficacy, environmental transformational leaders foster the internalization of the organization's environmental values. Additionally, the use of external rewards complements these efforts, stimulating both internal and external motivations for engaging in green behaviors.

Leadership support for environmental behaviors can fulfill employees' psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, as outlined in self-determination theory. When leaders provide conditions conducive to environmental behavior, encourage initiative, and promote open communication, they not only satisfy these psychological needs but also enhance employees' intrinsic motivation for environmental protection (Priyankara et al., 2018). This, in turn, encourages participation in organizational citizenship behaviors focused on environmental protection.

The commitment of management to environmental protection, combined with employees' perception of organizational support, influences attitudes and behaviors through the lens of organizational fairness. This dynamic fosters a stronger commitment to environmental protection and encourages more environmentally responsible behaviors (Erdogan et al., 2015).

2.2.3 Internal Employee Factors

Understanding how individual characteristics shape employees' engagement in green behaviors is crucial for fostering an environmentally conscious workforce. This section explores the impact of green values, personality traits, and emotional intelligence on promoting pro-environmental actions within the workplace.

Green values reflect an individual's positive attitudes towards environmental protection [13]. Studies by Dumont et al., (2017), Graves & Sarkis (2018) have highlighted green values as a significant moderating variable in the expression of green behaviors. Dumont et al., (2017) draws on supply-value fit theory to suggest that alignment between an individual's green values and the organization's environmental ethos strengthens the employee's connection to the organization, positively influencing their attitudes and behaviors. Similarly, Graves (2018) employs motivation theory to argue that employees with strong environmental values are more likely to embrace and act upon their leaders' environmental initiatives, enhancing their motivation to engage in green behaviors.

The influence of personality traits on environmental behavior is well documented. Kim et al. (2017) examine the roles of inner responsibility and moral reflection as motivational factors leading to green behaviors. They define moral reflection as the process of contemplating moral issues, which varies among individuals. Employees with a high sense of responsibility, characterized by
compliance, reliability, and self-discipline, are more inclined to engage in moral reflection and, consequently, environmentally friendly behaviors as a manifestation of their moral motivation.

Emotional intelligence, the ability to reason about and control emotions, plays a pivotal role in bridging environmental intentions and behaviors. According to Salovey & Mayer (1990), emotional intelligence encompasses an integrative response across physiological, motivational, subjective, and empirical dimensions, highlighting its comprehensive impact on human behavior. Similarly, George (2006) emphasizes that emotion significantly influences behavior, guiding attention in specific contexts. Aziz et al. (2018) investigate emotional intelligence as a mediating factor between employees' environmental intentions and their actual pro-environmental actions. High emotional intelligence enables employees to strengthen the formation of their environmental intentions, guiding their thoughts and actions towards engaging in green behaviors more effectively.

3. Conclusions of the Study and Future Prospects

This paper has engaged with a diverse range of literatures to systematically examine the definition, influencing factors, and theoretical foundations of employee green behavior. Our findings hold both theoretical significance and practical utility for implementing environmental protection measures and boosting the corporate social responsibility image of enterprises. In the context of green development, companies are encouraged to go beyond merely establishing regulations and improving processes for energy conservation and emission reduction. Emphasizing the cultivation of a green culture and fostering an environmental protection atmosphere are critical. Leadership styles should evolve to inspire employee motivation for green behaviors, leveraging a top-down effect to encourage participation in environmental protection activities. While research on employee green behavior in Australia is still in its nascent stage and offers considerable room for growth, this paper proposes several avenues for future exploration. The lack of a unified definition for employee green behavior, as viewed from various international perspectives, suggests a need for scholars, particularly in Australia, to develop a definition that not only aligns with global understandings but also reflects Australia’s unique cultural characteristics. Future studies should consider the impact of Australia’s distinctive cultural traits, such as collectivism and power distance, on employee green behavior, a dimension currently underexplored in existing literature. The predominance of scales developed by foreign scholars highlights a gap in research tools suited to Australia’s context. Efforts should be directed towards creating an employee green behavior scale that incorporates Australia cultural nuances. By addressing these gaps, future research can offer deeper insights into promoting green behaviors among employees, tailored to the cultural and organizational contexts specific to Australia. This endeavor will not only advance academic understanding but also guide companies in nurturing an environmentally conscious workforce.
References


