

Chapter 5

Green Employee Behavior: Antecedents, Outcomes, and the Road to Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

Organizations are increasingly incorporating green concepts into their operations and strategies due to the urgency of today's environmental concerns. Green Employee Behavior (GEB), as a crucial element of corporate environmental efforts, has attracted attention from organizational scholars and practitioners. This study examines the antecedents and outcomes of GEB by exploring individual, leadership, team, and organizational level factors that promote these behaviors. Additionally, various mediating mechanisms and moderating factors that influence GEB are discussed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics shaping environmentally responsible behavior. The study also connects GEB with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasizing its potential to support global sustainability initiatives. Lastly, this research concludes with emerging trends and future research directions on GEB.

INTRODUCTION

The accelerating loss of natural resources, degradation of the environment, climate changes, pollution and biodiversity loss driven by human activities poses a growing threat to the nature and biological life (Safari et al., 2018; Zacher et al., 2023). These developments have prompted governments to establish green policies, which organizations have integrated their operations through environmentally supportive practices (Afsar et al., 2018; Fawehinmi et al., 2020). There has also been an increasing public expectation that organizations, particularly those with significant environmental footprints, prioritize responsibility for their environmental impacts. Companies now face increased public scrutiny and are subjected to greater pressure to demonstrate environmental stewardship (Ramus & Killmer, 2007). Consistently, The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) acknowledge the importance of environmental sustainability. The “greening” of businesses, workplace practices, procedures, and employee behaviors is reflected in the SDGs. In particular, SDG 12, “responsible consumption and production”, calls for organizations to adopt sustainable production practices throughout their operations (Khalid et al., 2022).

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This increasing awareness of environmental sustainability has gradually turned green behaviors into one of the foci of both academic research and business practitioners (Francoeur et al., 2021; Katz et al., 2022).

The success of environmentally conscious actions of organizations largely depends on the commitment of employees and their engagement in green behaviors (Raineri & Paillé, 2016; Robertson & Barling, 2013). GEB refers to workplace behaviors that support environmental protection and advance sustainable development, directly contributing to organizational and environmental sustainability (Kim et al., 2017). Green behaviors are prosocial organizational actions that transform organizational practices into more sustainable and eco-friendly ones, with significant potential for value creation by benefiting both the organization and its stakeholders (Ramus & Killmer, 2007). Therefore, research on GEB expands the focus of sustainability management from the corporate level to the individual level, and recognizes the role of employees' cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors in supporting sustainability (Ones & Dilchert, 2012b; Lamm et al., 2013).

The aim of this study is to examine the antecedents and outcomes of GEB within organizations, with a specific focus on how individual, leadership, team, and organizational level factors drive employees' green actions. This study also seeks to examine the outcomes of GEB, particularly how such behaviors contribute to firm level performance indicators and employee related outcomes. In this discussion, various mediating mechanisms that connect related antecedents to GEB, as well as moderators that strengthen or weaken these effects are explored to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex processes influencing employees' environmentally responsible behaviors. By aligning GEB with the SDGs, this research also aims to highlight the role of GEB in supporting global sustainability initiatives, providing a pathway for organizations to integrate green practices that contribute to the achievement of broader environmental and developmental goals. Lastly, emerging trends and future research directions will be highlighted, providing a comprehensive view of this evolving field.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF GREEN EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOR

Since climate change and environmental degradation are mainly caused by human activities and the success of environmental initiatives largely relies on employee behavior, it is now crucial for organizations to encourage green behaviors within workplaces (Robertson & Barling, 2013). Green behaviors can directly mitigate the negative impacts of human activities on ecosystems. Establishing a workplace framework focused on sustainable development offers an effective approach to engaging stakeholders in rethinking sustainability practices (Farooq et al., 2023). GEB is conceptualized as “scalable actions and behaviors that employees engage in that are linked with and contribute to or detract from environmental sustainability” (Ones & Dilchert, 2012a, p. 87). According to another definition, GEB broadly refers to “work behaviors directed toward the protection or improvement of the natural environment, which may or may not generate value for the organization; these behaviors may be performed by employees situated at any organizational level” (Ciocirlan, 2017, p. 56). Tang et al. (2023, p. 302) focused on behavioral aspect of GEB and defined the construct as “a behavioral process which reflects individuals' psychological state vis-à-vis surrounding contexts, from setting a green goal to the actual enactment of goal-relevant behaviors”.

GEB can be conceptualized from the perspective of value-oriented goal setting. The key assumption behind this approach is the notion that employee values stimulate green behaviors. Although individuals can embrace multiple values, they vary in the values they prioritize which affects their green behaviors

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