

Chapter 6


The Human Side of Sustainability: Environmental Leadership and Its Impact on Employee Growth

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between leadership and environmental sustainability, emphasizing the evolving role of leaders in fostering sustainable development. It examines how leadership practices drive environmental change by integrating sustainability into decision-making, organizational strategy, and stakeholder engagement. As organizations face increasing environmental challenges, regulatory demands, and societal expectations, leaders must balance financial performance with long-term sustainability goals. The study highlights the importance of stakeholder collaboration, corporate social responsibility, and strategic leadership in advancing sustainability initiatives.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-2210-0.ch006

1. INTRODUCTION TO LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, and resource depletion are not only threats to ecosystems but also to human well-being, particularly in the workplace. Research indicates that poor environmental conditions contribute to heightened employee stress, reduced productivity, and increased mental health concerns. A 2024 report by Mental Health America found that three-quarters of U.S. employees experience high work stress, negatively impacting their sleep, while three in five report adverse effects on their relationships. Additionally, a 2023 survey by the American Psychological Association revealed that 19% of workers consider their workplace to be very or somewhat toxic. Furthermore, studies show that environmental uncertainty in the workplace can elevate employees' work pressure, leading to increased rates of anxiety and depression. These findings emphasize the growing need for leadership that not only drives environmental responsibility but also prioritizes employee well-being.

This chapter argues that environmental leadership is not only crucial for planetary health but also a key driver of employee well-being. A company's commitment to environmental sustainability fosters a sense of purpose among employees, strengthens organizational values, and enhances workplace morale. Employees increasingly seek workplaces that align with their ethical and environmental values, and organizations that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability can attract and retain top talent. This reduces stress related to job security and career fulfillment while fostering a healthier, more engaged workforce. By embedding environmental responsibility into their corporate culture, organizations not only contribute to a more sustainable world but also create work environments that support employee mental health, collaboration, and overall job satisfaction.

Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the actions and behaviours of individuals and organizations, particularly when addressing pressing global challenges such as environmental sustainability (Begum et al., 2022; Aftab et al., 2022). The qualities, behaviours, and decisions of leaders significantly influence the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at mitigating environmental issues. Leaders can either foster solutions that promote sustainable practices—thereby alleviating workplace stress and fostering a healthier environment—or perpetuate behaviours and systems that exacerbate environmental degradation, leading to increased anxiety and decreased morale among employees. Despite the importance of leadership in driving environmental change, the conceptualization of leadership in both popular discourse and academic research remains narrow and often limited to traditional frameworks (Begum et al., 2022; Aftab et al., 2022).

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