

A Review of Research on Factors Influencing Employee Green Behavior

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the pressing need for businesses to adopt eco-friendly practices amidst rising ecological concerns, policy directives, and growing public environmental consciousness. It centers on employees as pivotal agents in corporate sustainability, systematically analyzing the nuances of their green behaviors and multifaceted influencers like company policies, leadership by example, individual values, and organizational culture. The research consolidates past studies to guide firms on fostering staff eco-initiatives, emphasizing a green culture and education, and robust leadership as strategic levers for enhancing and refining environmental management.

KEYWORDS

Employee Green Behavior; Sustainable Development; Behavioral Influencing Factors; Research Review

1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change and environmental pollution, as significant global challenges, underscore the profound impact of human activities on the natural environment. Among these, organizational behavior emerges as a crucial factor that cannot be ignored. Since the 1940s, the academic community has paid increasing attention to the sustainable development of organizational environments, emphasizing particularly the pivotal role of enterprises in addressing climate change and the urgency of their green transformation. Current research indicates that the effective implementation of corporate green strategies heavily relies on the extensive participation and proactive behaviors of employees. Employees are not only the executors of organizational environmental policies but also the cornerstone of achieving green innovation and sustainable development goals. In this context, employee green behavior—specific actions taken by employees in the workplace to contribute to environmental objectives—has become a focal point of academic exploration.

This study aims to systematically integrate domestic and international literature to deeply analyze the multidimensional influencing factors of employee green behavior, clarify its conceptual connotation, structural characteristics, and evaluation methods, and use complex network analysis based on keywords to comprehensively reveal the research hotspots, development trends, and theoretical frameworks in this field. Specifically, this study pursues four major objectives: first, to review and define the basic concept of employee green behavior; second, to display the frontier dynamics of research through network analysis; third, to distill the essence of existing theoretical foundations and empirical studies; and finally, to summarize the limitations of current research and indicate future research directions.

Under the global consensus on ecological civilization and China's guiding concept of "green development," the importance of corporate green behavior is increasingly prominent. Particularly in resource-intensive industries, fostering an environmentally friendly corporate culture that involves all employees is key to alleviating environmental pressures and driving green innovation. Therefore, exploring how to stimulate and cultivate employees' green awareness and encourage them to practice environmental protection in their daily lives and work is not only crucial for improving corporate environmental performance but also essential for achieving societal sustainable development. Given the rich research achievements in this field abroad, strengthening domestic research on employee green behavior and drawing on international experiences are of profound significance for promoting the green transformation of Chinese enterprises and the entire society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Employee Green Behavior Concept

Employee Green Behavior (EGB), also known as pro-environmental behavior or organizational citizenship behavior for the environment, reflects individual environmental actions within the workplace aimed at minimizing negative impacts on the natural environment or actively promoting environmental protection. Although this concept is widely accepted, scholars have different interpretations of its connotation. Steg and Vlek (2009) broadly define EGB as any individual activity intended to reduce environmental harm or enhance environmental protection. In contrast, Bin Saeed (2019) emphasizes activities that employees voluntarily participate in, which enhance the organization's social image and environmental performance. Ones and Dilchert (2017) define EGB from an environmental performance perspective, as measurable actions directly related to environmental sustainability within the workplace that promote or maintain environmental health. Examples of these behaviors include daily energy-saving measures such as double-sided printing, using eco-friendly transportation, and reducing resource waste.

The classification and definition of employee green behavior are multi-dimensional, encompassing role-related, task-related, and voluntary behaviors. On one hand, role-related green behaviors are prescribed by job responsibilities and are constrained by organizational rules and reward systems, such as ensuring the compliant disposal of hazardous waste. On the other hand, extra-role green behaviors are initiated by employees independently, without explicit institutional requirements, such as turning off lights to save energy voluntarily. Task-related green behaviors (work-related) directly stem from work objectives, such as the recycling of resources, while voluntary green behaviors often manifest as personal initiatives, such as reducing paper usage. Ones and colleagues further refine EGB into five dimensions: sustainable work, resource conservation, influence propagation, proactive engagement, and harm avoidance. Norton et al. distinguish between mandatory EGB (such as adhering to company environmental policies) and voluntary EGB (such as personally advocating for environmental projects) based on the level of compulsion involved. Overall, employee green behavior encompasses all conscious and prescribed actions by employees in the workplace aimed at protecting and promoting environmental sustainability, involving both individual-level environmental intentions and organizational regulations and incentives for environmental behavior.

The factors influencing employee green behavior are multi-dimensional and multi-layered, covering individual characteristics, organizational environment, and leadership roles. These factors intertwine to collectively shape employees' environmental tendencies and actual actions.

2.2. Factors Influencing Employee Green Behavior

2.2.1. Individual-Level Factors

Personality Traits: High levels of conscientiousness and moral reflectiveness are crucial internal drivers for employees to engage in environmentally friendly behaviors. Employees with a strong sense of responsibility tend to integrate their personal values with the organization's green goals through moral reflection, exhibiting more green behaviors. Additionally, personality traits, particularly conscientiousness, have been shown to positively correlate with employees' environmental tendencies, motivating them to take proactive environmental actions.

Personal Values and Emotions: Employees' green values, or their positive attitudes toward environmental protection, are key moderating variables in determining their green behaviors. Employees with high green values are more likely to respond to the organization's environmental initiatives and align with its green practices. Furthermore, the ability to manage personal emotions (emotional intelligence) serves as a bridge connecting employees' environmental intentions and actual behaviors by influencing their behavioral beliefs and motivations, thereby promoting environmental actions.

2.2.2. Organizational-Level Factors

Green Human Resource Management: Organizations shape employees' environmental behaviors directly through green recruitment, training, and performance management strategies. Additionally, by creating a green psychological climate, they enhance employees' perception and support of environmental policies, encouraging both role-related and extra-role green behaviors. Organizational culture and leaders' commitment to environmental protection also play critical roles, particularly leadership styles rooted in Taoist philosophy, which can cultivate employees' environmental awareness and promote harmony with nature.

Organizational Climate and Culture: The green climate of an organization, or the shared perception of the organization's environmental policies and practices among employees, is a powerful driver of employee environmental behavior. Moreover, organizational culture, especially those embedded with environmental values, has a long-term impact on employee behavior, fostering sustained environmental action habits.

2.2.3. Leadership Factors

Leadership Example and Incentives: Leaders' environmental behaviors and attitudes serve as models for employees through social learning mechanisms. Specific leadership styles, such as ethical leadership and transformational leadership focused on the environment, set moral standards, provide incentive mechanisms, and establish environmental visions. These actions both stimulate employees' intrinsic motivation and reinforce their environmental behaviors through external rewards, creating a dual drive of internal and external motivation.

Interaction of Leadership and Green HRM: The synergy between leadership behaviors and green human resource management practices significantly influences employees' environmental behaviors. This synergy is evident not only in the consistency of information dissemination but also in providing psychological resources, such as green mindfulness, enhancing employees' environmental capabilities and promoting broader green actions.

2.2.4. Other Factors

Person-Job Fit and Job Design: The green fit between employees and their jobs, especially within the context of green job design, offers a new perspective on influencing green behavior. Green job characteristics can motivate employees and increase the frequency and quality of their environmental behaviors.

Corporate Social Responsibility: A company's social responsibility practices shape its public image and directly influence employees' environmental attitudes and behaviors, encouraging them to take a more proactive stance on social and environmental issues.

In summary, the formation of employee green behavior is a complex systemic process involving individual traits, organizational culture and climate, leadership influence, and the fit between job characteristics and personal attributes. Understanding and optimizing the interplay of these factors is crucial for promoting organizational environmental actions and achieving sustainable development goals.

3. MANAGEMENT ENLIGHTENMENT

3.1. Cultivation and Reinforcement of Green Culture

Corporate culture is the invisible hand that shapes employee behavior. A clear and deeply ingrained green culture can effectively guide employees' environmental actions. Managers should integrate green principles into the company's mission, vision, and values. By utilizing daily communication, training, and reward mechanisms, they can continuously enhance employees' environmental awareness, making green behavior a default organizational norm. The demonstration effect of leadership is crucial; the green actions and decisions of senior management can permeate through the organization, fostering a top-down environmental ethos.

3.2. Implementation of Green Human Resource Management

Green HRM strategies are direct levers to stimulate employee green behavior. Companies should design and implement green recruitment, training, performance evaluation, and incentive mechanisms, ensuring that employees perceive the importance of environmental protection at every stage of their career. For instance, incorporating environmental performance into employee evaluations and rewarding outstanding contributions can motivate employees to actively engage in environmental activities and strengthen their identification with and commitment to the organization's environmental goals.

3.3. Adjustment and Innovation in Leadership Styles

Leadership styles directly influence the formation of employee behavior. Adopting green transformational or ethical leadership approaches, by setting environmental visions, providing environmental education, and modeling green behavior, can effectively inspire employees' environmental motivation and self-efficacy. Leaders should encourage employee participation in environmental initiatives, provide necessary resources and support, and help internalize green behavior as part of employees' personal values, fostering a proactive environmental drive within the organization.

3.4. Customized Incentive and Recognition Mechanisms

Incentive mechanisms for employee green behavior should be diverse and personalized, combining material rewards and spiritual incentives. For example, establishing green behavior recognition systems, offering opportunities to participate in environmental projects, and implementing green consumption subsidies can meet different employee needs. Additionally, establishing feedback mechanisms that highlight the positive impact of employees' environmental actions on the organization and society can enhance their sense of achievement and satisfaction.

3.5. Continuous Research and Evaluation

Companies should stay abreast of the latest research findings in the field of employee green behavior and adjust their management strategies accordingly. Establishing effective evaluation systems to monitor changes in employees' green behavior regularly, assess the effectiveness of environmental policies, and optimize based on feedback is crucial. Additionally, fostering internal research to explore green behavior promotion mechanisms tailored to the company's specific context ensures that management strategies remain forward-thinking and effective.

4. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

Through a comprehensive analysis of extensive literature, this study systematically elucidates the theoretical framework of employee green behavior, clarifies its conceptual connotations, and outlines key influencing factors and their theoretical foundations. This provides a robust theoretical support and practical guidance for the formulation and implementation of corporate environmental strategies. The study emphasizes that enterprises should actively align with the trend of green development, not only advancing energy-saving and emission reduction through technology and policy but also committing to the green evolution of corporate culture and innovation in leadership models. By leveraging top-down demonstration, enterprises can awaken employees' environmental awareness, promote the widespread adoption and deepening of green behaviors, and thus enhance their social responsibility image and sustainable development capabilities.

Looking ahead, the field of employee green behavior research holds significant potential and demands further exploration. The primary task is to unify the definition of employee green behavior theoretically, establishing universally accepted boundaries from macro concepts to micro-level operations, while integrating China's unique social and cultural context. Additionally, research should strengthen the localized perspective, deeply exploring the influence pathways of distinctive cultural elements (such as collectivism and power distance) on employees' environmental behaviors to further refine the theoretical framework. Moreover, given the current gap in scale development, there is an urgent need to construct assessment tools for employee green behavior that reflect Chinese culture. This will enable precise measurement and scientific evaluation, laying a solid foundation for subsequent research and practice.

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