Effects of Green Transformational Leadership on Green Employee Involvement: A Concept Paper

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ABSTRACT

This concept paper examines the relationship between green transformational leadership (GTL) and green employee involvement (GEI), highlighting how leadership practices can inspire and sustain employee involvement in sustainability initiatives. The primary objective is to develop a conceptual framework that explains the mechanisms through which GTL fosters GEI, emphasizing its role in enhancing organizational environmental performance. A systematic review of peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2024 was conducted using the Web of Science and Scopus databases, applying keywords such as "green transformational leadership," "green employee involvement," and "green human resource management." Seventeen high-quality studies were analysed, revealing that GTL significantly influences GEI through vision-setting, role modelling, empowerment, and the integration of green human resource management (GHRM) practices This study is underpinned by Transformational Leadership Theory, which explains how leaders inspire employees toward environmental goals, Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity (AMO) Theory, which highlights the importance of leadership in providing employees with the resources and incentives for green engagement, and Social Identity Theory, which describes how employees adopt pro-environmental behaviours by identifying with sustainability-focused leaders and organizations. Findings indicate that GTL fosters a shared environmental responsibility, motivating employees to actively contribute to sustainability initiatives such as waste reduction, energy conservation, and eco-innovation. This study contributes to leadership and sustainability literature by offering a theoretical foundation for future empirical research and providing practical insights for organizations seeking to enhance green employee involvement. The proposed framework serves as a valuable guide for academics and practitioners in leveraging leadership for sustainable organizational transformation.

Keywords: Green Transformational Leadership, Green Employee Involvement, Green Human Resource Management

INTRODUCTION

The growing environmental challenges, including climate change, resource depletion, and pollution, necessitate innovative organizational strategies to ensure environmental sustainability. Leadership plays a crucial role in embedding environmental values into organizational culture and practices. Green Transformational Leadership (GTL), an extension of transformational leadership, serves as a key catalyst in fostering environmental sustainability by integrating eco-conscious decision-making and operations [18], [19]. GTL aligns organizational sustainability with global environmental goals by promoting vision-setting, role modelling, and employee empowerment [3], [4]. Moreover, GTL empowers employees as agents of change, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for environmental initiatives and reinforcing sustainable workplace practices [5], [6]. This approach not only enhances organizational performance and sustainability but also contributes to broader environmental preservation efforts.

Green Employee Involvement (GEI) refers to employees' active participation in environmental initiatives such as waste reduction, energy conservation, and green innovation. This engagement goes beyond compliance with regulations, representing a proactive commitment to environmental goals [7], [8]. Leadership fosters GEI within organizations by creating a supportive work environment where employees feel motivated to adopt environmentally responsible behaviours [9], [10]. By cultivating a workplace culture that prioritizes environmental values and aligns corporate strategies with sustainability principles, leaders can empower employees to not only participate in but also champion environmental initiatives in their roles. Despite growing recognition of GTL's role in environmental engagement, the relationship between leadership and employee participation in green efforts requires further exploration [10], [11].

This paper addresses this gap by examining the theoretical interrelationship between GTL and GEI, offering a framework to understand how leadership inspires and sustains employee commitment to environmental initiatives. Specifically, it explores the mechanisms through which leaders influence employees' attitudes and behaviours toward environmental responsibility, fostering a collaborative and engaged workforce. By synthesizing recent literature and leveraging theoretical perspectives, this study provides practical insights for organizations seeking to strengthen their environmental sustainability efforts through leadership strategies. The research underscores the critical role of GTL in translating environmental values into tangible workplace actions and identifies effective leadership as a key driver of both organizational and environmental sustainability. The study aims to guide both practitioners and policymakers in leveraging leadership to enhance environmental stewardship, increase employee engagement in green initiatives, and implement sustainability-driven corporate strategies that align with global environmental goals.

Problem Statement

Despite growing recognition of the importance of environmental sustainability, organizations continue to face significant challenges in engaging employees in green initiatives. Many organizations implement environmental management systems, but the success of such programs depends on the active participation of employees, which is often insufficient [2], [11]. While GTL is recognized as a key driver of sustainability, its specific role in fostering GEI remains underexplored. Most existing research focuses on the broad organizational benefits of GTL rather than the individual leadership practices that directly enhance employee engagement in green initiatives. Additionally, there is a lack of empirical studies examining how different leadership behaviours influence employees' sustained commitment to environmental initiatives. Studies rarely investigate how specific leadership actions, such as role modelling, empowerment, and sustainability-oriented communication, directly encourage employees to take ownership of green initiatives. Without meaningful employee engagement, even the most comprehensive leadership strategies risk failing to achieve their intended environmental impact, creating a persistent gap between organizational sustainability goals and actual workplace practices [9].

One major challenge lies in the translation of leadership intentions into sustained employee behaviours. While GTL focuses on inspiring employees toward green values, the mechanisms through which it influences employee attitudes and actions remain unclear [3]. Factors such as employee motivation, organizational culture, and access to sustainability resources contribute to GEI but are often overlooked in existing research. Many studies primarily focus on broader organizational policies rather than examining how these internal factors shape employees' willingness and ability to engage in green initiatives. Moreover, industries with high environmental impact, such as manufacturing, tourism, and hospitality, face additional challenges in aligning leadership-driven green initiatives with employee behaviours due to operational pressures and resource constraints [4], [9]. This misalignment often results in superficial sustainability efforts that fail to create a lasting cultural shift.

Furthermore, the existing literature lacks comprehensive frameworks that connect GTL to measurable employee engagement outcomes. While research highlights GTL's potential to inspire pro-environmental behaviours, there is limited focus on how leadership fosters systemic and sustained employee participation in green initiatives [3], [6]. Most studies provide general insights into leadership's role in promoting sustainability but fail to outline specific, actionable pathways that translate leadership influence into long-term employee engagement. Additionally, empirical research on GTL often lacks quantifiable metrics to assess the depth and consistency of employee involvement in environmental practices, making it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership-driven green initiatives. Without a structured framework that links leadership actions, employee behaviour, and

measurable outcomes, organizations may struggle to implement strategies that lead to meaningful and sustained environmental engagement in the workplace. A deeper exploration of context-specific leadership interventions and their direct impact on employee motivation and participation is necessary to bridge this gap and provide organizations with clear strategies for fostering an environmentally engaged workforce.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Green Transformational Leadership

Green Transformational Leadership (GTL) represents a significant evolution in leadership practices, emphasizing the integration of environmental values into organizational strategies. As an extension of transformational leadership, GTL inspires and motivates employees to prioritize sustainability goals, align their behaviours with eco-friendly practices, and innovate solutions that minimize environmental impact [5]. This leadership style is characterized by a clear vision for a sustainable future, active employee empowerment, and a collaborative culture that supports green initiatives [12]. Empirical studies have demonstrated GTL's influence in shaping pro-environmental behaviours and driving green innovation, highlighting its potential as a cornerstone for embedding sustainability into organizational practices [13], [14].
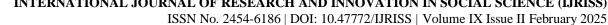
Green Employee Involvement

Green Employee Involvement (GEI) refers to the proactive engagement of employees in organizational sustainability efforts, including energy conservation, waste reduction, and green innovation [8]. Unlike traditional compliance-driven environmental programs, GEI reflects a deeper level of commitment, where employees actively take on the role of environmental stewards in their workplace. Multiple factors influence GEI, including organizational culture, leadership practices, and access to resources. Empirical studies indicate that employees who feel empowered and motivated by their leaders are more likely to take ownership of environmental initiatives, thereby driving collective progress toward sustainability goals [4]. This highlights GEI as a crucial component in the successful implementation of green strategies within organizations.

Relationship of GTL and GEI

The relationship between GTL and has gained increasing research attention, reflecting the vital role of leadership in fostering employee engagement in sustainability initiatives. GTL is defined by its ability to motivate, empower, and enable employees to pursue environmentally oriented goals, thereby creating an organizational culture that prioritizes sustainability [2]. Leaders who embody strong environmental values act as role models, encouraging employees to align their behaviours with organizational green objectives [10]. By fostering trust and a shared purpose, GTL enables employees to take ownership of sustainability efforts, shifting their role from passive participants to active contributors in green initiatives [3].

Green transformational leaders influence GEI through several mechanisms. One key pathway is the integration of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices, such as environmentally focused recruitment, training, and performance-based incentives. These practices align employees' skills, motivations, and opportunities with the organization's environmental objectives [10]. GTL also creates a work environment that fosters a culture of innovation and creativity, enabling employees to propose and implement green solutions within their roles [15]. This approach not only enhances employee engagement but also ensures that sustainability becomes deeply embedded in the organization's operations and culture. Furthermore, the emotional connection established by transformational leaders motivates employees to go beyond expectations in their contributions to environmental sustainability [14].

Despite the clear relationship between GTL and GEI, gaps remain in understanding the mediating factors that strengthen this connection. For example, resource availability, organizational resistance, and the clarity of environmental goals can significantly affect how effectively GTL fosters GEI [14]. Additionally, the role of intrinsic employee motivation, which is shaped by leaders' ability to create a compelling vision for sustainability, requires further exploration [12]. Addressing these gaps calls for a deeper examination of the leadership processes that inspire and sustain green employee engagement. This understanding is essential for organizations

seeking to transition from superficial green practices to a deeply embedded culture of environmental stewardship.

Underpinning Theories

The relationship between GTL and GEI can be comprehensively explained through three foundational theoretical frameworks. Transformational leadership theory serves as the foundational framework for understanding green transformational leadership (GTL). This theory emphasizes that transformational leaders inspire and motivate employees by articulating a compelling vision, fostering trust, and encouraging innovative and proactive behaviours [12]. In the context of GTL, leaders extend these principles to promote sustainability by integrating environmental goals into organizational strategies and serving as role models for eco-friendly behaviours [3], [14]. By fostering a shared sense of purpose, transformational leaders empower employees to transcend their immediate responsibilities and actively participate in green initiatives, driving both organizational and environmental performance [4].

Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity (AMO) Theory offers a comprehensive lens to examine how GTL fosters GEI through consideration of workers' capabilities, motivation, and opportunity to perform [8]. GTL enhances these dimensions through a variety of processes such as green human resource management (GHRM) practice, skill development through training, reward programs for motivation, and structured opportunities for employees to engage in sustainability initiatives [10]. For example, leaders can empower employees by creating platforms for eco-innovation or assigning them roles in green projects, ensuring that their capabilities are aligned with organizational environmental goals [12], [15]. This alignment between leadership practices and employee potential facilitates meaningful engagement in green initiatives and contributes to the long-term achievement in terms of sustainability.

Social identity theory provides a valuable perspective on how GTL fosters GEI by emphasizing the importance of group identification in shaping employee behaviours. Employees derive part of their identity from their organization, and when leaders champion environmental values, it strengthens employees' alignment with a shared green identity [14]. This sense of belonging motivates employees to adopt behaviours that reflect the organization's commitment to sustainability, creating a collective culture of environmental stewardship [6], [10]. Leaders who emphasize sustainability as a core organizational value effectively integrate environmental goals into the workforce's identity, encouraging systemic engagement and commitment to green practices [16]. Through this lens, GTL not only inspires employees but also drives instils ecobehavioral intervention in a whole workforce.

METHODOLOGY

This concept paper adopts a systematic review approach to explore the relationship between GTL and GEI, focusing on academic articles published between 2020 and 2024. The systematic review was conducted using the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases, both of which are renowned for their extensive repositories of peer-reviewed literature in leadership, sustainability, and organizational behaviour. The search was conducted using the keywords "green transformational leadership," "green employee involvement," and "green human resource management" to identify relevant studies. The focus was specifically on GEI, emphasizing its role as a critical aspect of sustainability practices, independent of its inclusion within broader green human resource management (GHRM) frameworks.

A structured selection process was followed to refine and identify articles that aligned with the research objectives. The inclusion criteria required that articles be peer-reviewed, published between 2020 and 2024, and explicitly analyse the relationship between GTL and GEI. Articles were excluded if they primarily focused on GHRM practices without emphasizing leadership's direct impact on employee engagement or if they addressed leadership theories unrelated to sustainability. The initial search yielded 37 articles, which were screened based on their titles, abstracts, and keywords for relevance. A detailed full-text review further refined the selection and after the final evaluation, 17 articles were selected for analysis, all of which employed quantitative research methods to measure the GTL and GEI relationship.

The final selection of studies spans various industries and geographical regions, providing a comprehensive perspective on how GTL fosters GEI. These studies offer insights into leadership-driven mechanisms that promote employee involvement in sustainability initiatives, reinforcing GEI as a key outcome of effective green leadership. By systematically synthesizing the findings, this methodology identifies key trends, patterns, and research gaps, supporting the development of a conceptual framework that positions GEI as a central element of sustainability-driven leadership. The approach allows the study to draw meaningful conclusions about the effectiveness of GTL in enhancing employee engagement and provides actionable recommendations for organizations aiming to strengthen leadership-driven sustainability efforts. Ultimately, this systematic review highlights GEI as a critical factor in organizational sustainability, with GTL playing a pivotal role in shaping long-term employee commitment to environmental initiatives. Table 1 provides a detailed summary of the methodology, including databases used, search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the screening process.

Table 1: Methodology Overview

Section	Description
Databases	Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus.
Keywords Used	"Green transformational leadership," "Green employee involvement," and "Green human resource management."
Year	2020-2024
Inclusion Criteria	- Peer-reviewed articles. - Research focusing on the relationship between GTL and GEI.
Exclusion Criteria	- Studies primarily focused on GHRM without addressing GEI or leadership dimensions. - Research unrelated to sustainability or GTL.
Screening Process	- Initial identification of 37 articles based on titles, abstracts, and keywords. - Full-text reviews conducted to assess alignment with research objectives.
Final Selection	A total of 17 articles were selected that specifically addressed the relationship between GTL and GEI.

RESULT

The findings from the systematic review indicate that Green Transformational Leadership (GTL) has a direct and significant influence on Green Employee Involvement (GEI), reinforcing the role of leadership in driving sustainability engagement at the organization. Organizations where leaders emphasize pro-environmental behaviours, articulate clear sustainability goals, and empower employees to engage in green initiatives tend to exhibit higher levels of employee participation in environmental efforts [9], [13]. These efforts include waste reduction, energy conservation, and eco-innovation, which are increasingly essential in industries such as SMEs, manufacturing, and hospitality were the predominant sectors covered in this study. The results suggest that when GTL is present, employees are more likely to internalize sustainability values, actively contribute to environmental programs, and take ownership of workplace sustainability initiatives.

Furthermore, the systematic review highlights that organizations with strong GTL practices often implement structured green policies, leading to greater employee commitment and long-term sustainability engagement. In the manufacturing and hospitality industries, where environmental impact is significant, GTL appears to be a critical factor in encouraging employees to support sustainability initiatives beyond regulatory compliance [7], [10]. SMEs, despite facing resource limitations, show that effective green leadership enhances employee willingness to adopt sustainable workplace behaviours, reinforcing the direct link between GTL and GEI [3], [15]. The findings confirm that leadership-driven sustainability strategies are essential for embedding environmental consciousness into workplace culture and ensuring long-term commitment to green initiatives.

DISCUSSION

The relationship between GTL and GEI demonstrates that leadership is a primary driver of employee involvement in sustainability efforts. Leaders who establish a clear vision for sustainability, demonstrate pro-

environmental behaviours, and actively support green initiatives create a culture in which employees feel inspired and motivated to engage in sustainability practices [6], [12]. This effect is particularly evident in SMEs, manufacturing, and hospitality, where sustainability challenges such as resource constraints, high environmental footprints, and customer-driven green expectations require strong leadership to encourage employee participation. By fostering trust, empowerment, and sustainability-focused communication, GTL ensures that employees go beyond compliance and actively participate in green initiatives [11].

A key mechanism through which GTL fosters GEI is by providing employees with the knowledge, motivation, and support needed to engage in green initiatives. Leaders who prioritize environmental training, sustainability policies, and workplace incentives create an environment where employees understand the importance of sustainability and are equipped to contribute meaningfully [6], [16]. In manufacturing, where sustainability efforts focus on resource efficiency, waste reduction, and carbon footprint management, GTL plays a critical role in shaping employee behaviours [8]. Similarly, in hospitality, where sustainability is increasingly driven by eco-conscious consumers, green leadership ensures that employees embrace environmental best practices and integrate them into daily service operations [2].

Additionally, GTL fosters a strong emotional and organizational commitment to sustainability. Transformational leaders act as role models, demonstrating personal dedication to environmental stewardship, which in turn inspires employees to align their behaviours with organizational sustainability goals [17]. This role-modelling effect is particularly relevant in SMEs, where leadership influence is often more direct and personal, creating a stronger connection between leadership initiatives and employee engagement [6]. Employees in SMEs tend to be more responsive to leadership-driven sustainability efforts, especially when they see leaders actively participating in green initiatives and reinforcing sustainability as a core organizational value. When employees perceive that sustainability is a deeply embedded priority rather than a temporary initiative, they are more likely to develop long-term environmental commitment, ensuring that sustainability remains an integral part of the organization's culture and daily operations [1].

Despite the strong relationship between GTL and GEI, several challenges hinder the effectiveness of leadership-driven sustainability initiatives. In SMEs, limited financial and human resources can make it difficult for leaders to implement large-scale sustainability programs, despite employee willingness to engage in green efforts [15]. Manufacturing companies, while having structured sustainability policies, often face high operational demands that limit employee involvement in voluntary green initiatives [7], [8]. Similarly, in hospitality, where customer expectations drive sustainability efforts, leaders must balance sustainability initiatives with service quality and operational efficiency [11], [13]. To overcome these challenges, organizations must strengthen leadership practices by integrating sustainability into strategic planning, employee engagement programs, and long-term organizational goals. By reinforcing sustainability at all levels of the organization, GTL can maximize employee involvement in sustainability efforts and contribute to long-term environmental and organizational success.

CONCLUSION

This concept paper highlights the critical role of Green Transformational Leadership (GTL) in fostering Green Employee Involvement (GEI) and emphasizes their interconnectedness in driving organizational sustainability. The findings illustrate how GTL engages employees, aligns organizational behaviour with sustainability goals, and cultivates a culture of environmental stewardship. From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the importance of leadership-driven sustainability models, demonstrating that effective leadership strategies can directly enhance employee participation in green initiatives. By positioning GEI as a direct outcome of GTL, this paper contributes to leadership and sustainability literature by clarifying the mechanisms through which leaders influence environmental engagement. From a practical standpoint, organizations can leverage GTL principles to integrate sustainability into corporate culture, ensuring that employees actively contribute to green initiatives and long-term environmental goals. Leaders must prioritize sustainability communication, empower employees with knowledge and training, and create an environment where sustainable practices are both encouraged and rewarded. The study also underscores the relevance of GTL across various industries, particularly in SMEs, manufacturing, and hospitality, where sustainability challenges require strong leadership to drive employee engagement in green initiatives.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations that highlight opportunities for future research. The primary limitation is the lack of empirical validation, as this paper is conceptual and relies on a systematic review rather than direct quantitative or qualitative data collection. Future research should incorporate empirical studies such as longitudinal surveys, experimental research, and industry-specific case studies to test the proposed framework and measure the actual impact of GTL on GEI across different organizational settings. Additionally, while this study focuses on SMEs, manufacturing, and hospitality, future research could explore how GTL influences GEI in other sectors, such as healthcare, education, and technology-driven industries. Methodologically, researchers should consider comparative analyses between industries, mixed-method approaches combining qualitative and quantitative data, and the development of standardized metrics to assess leadership-driven sustainability initiatives. By addressing these research gaps, future studies can provide stronger empirical evidence, refine the theoretical understanding of GTL and GEI dynamics, and offer more actionable insights for organizations aiming to enhance sustainability leadership. This study serves as a foundation for future research and practical applications, providing a roadmap for organizations and scholars to further explore and enhance leadership-driven sustainability strategies.

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