

Making Sense of Green Practices: A Qualitative Study of Employees Understanding and Voluntary Green Behaviour

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Abstract

This study explores employees' understanding of green sustainable practices and policies within organizations and examines how such understanding influences their voluntary green behavior. Drawing on the growing importance of corporate social responsibility and environmental sustainability, the research adopts a qualitative approach to capture in-depth insights into employee perceptions. Data were collected through 20 semi-structured interviews with early-career professionals across diverse industries, and analysed using the Gioia methodology. The findings reveal significant gaps in awareness and communication of green policies within organizations, with many employees either unaware of such policies or conflating them with corporate social responsibility initiatives. The study further identifies that existing incentive mechanisms, particularly non-monetary recognition, are largely ineffective in motivating green behavior. Instead, employees emphasize the importance of intrinsic motivation and prefer green behavior to remain voluntary rather than policy-driven. Additionally, time constraints, prioritization of key performance-related tasks, and lack of organizational support emerge as critical barriers to the adoption of green practices. The results also highlight ambiguity in distinguishing between task-related and voluntary green behavior, along with contextual variations such as differences between work-from-home and office environments. This research contributes to the sustainability and organizational behavior literature by providing nuanced insights into the micro-level dynamics shaping employee green behavior. It underscores the importance of clear policy communication, alignment between organizational practices and employee perceptions, and the role of supportive environments in fostering sustainable workplace behavior.

Keywords: Green Organizational Practices, Employee Green Behaviour, Psychological Meaningfulness at Work, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Environmental Awareness, Qualitative Study

1) Introduction

Organizations have made significant efforts over the past few decades to handle environmental challenges in a more responsible and comprehensive manner (Wolff, Gondran, & Brodhag, 2018). It is a widely acknowledged truth that organizations significantly contribute to environmental damage (Robertson & Barling, 2013). Additionally, some products with high utility value are being thrown away, which leads to resource waste, energy loss, and environmental damage. Therefore, it is imperative that businesses collaborate, establish creative business practices through CSR activities, and deploy green practices with missionary zeal in order to make the entire supply chain green (Suganthi, 2019). Many organizational scholars, particularly tourism researchers, were drawn to the topic of encouraging employees to engage in pro-environmental behaviours (Afsar, Cheema, & Javed, 2018; Norton, Parker, Zacher, & Ashkanasy, 2015).

(Chou, Chen, & Wang, 2012). Additionally, businesses all around the world are starting to encourage their staff members to do voluntary actions that benefit the environment. The phrase "corporate social responsibility" (CSR) emphasizes that a company's social responsibilities must be in line with not just its financial objectives and regulatory restrictions, but also its ethical commitments and customers' discretionary expectations (Carroll, 1979). Employees play a crucial part in accomplishing corporate greening by engaging in a variety of pro-environmental actions, as is fundamentally accepted currently (Lülfes & Hahn, 2013). Organizations nowadays are more concerned about the environment than they were in the past (Dumont, Shen, & Deng, 2017; Ones & Dilchert, 2012). Companies all around the world are working to promote environmental responsibility, according to Aguinis and Glavas (2012), as a result of growing worries about the long-term antagonistic

impacts produced by a changing climate and environmental deterioration. Organizations all throughout the world are using a variety of pro-environment programmes (Zibarras & Coan, 2015). However, it is very crucial to point out that all those firms which have been acknowledged with pro-environmental work and initiatives directly or indirectly depend upon the pro-environmental behaviour of their employees (Robertson & Barling, 2013). As a result, these actions have a significant role in corporate environmental performance. Pro-environmental conduct refers to people acting in a way that benefits the environment. This individual conduct is also known as responsible, sustainable, and friendly behaviour toward the environment. As a result, it may be said that ecologically friendly conduct is the same as green behaviour (Osbaldiston & Schott, 2012). Any observable activity of an individual that contributes to the sustainability of the workplace environment is referred to as employee green behaviour (Anderson, Jackson, and Russell, 2013). This study explores the individual employee's understanding of these sustainable green policies and practices and their own voluntary green behavior. In order to conduct this study, qualitative analysis has been done by conducting 20 semi-structured interviews of working professionals having an experience of 2-5 years.

2) Review of Literature

2.1) Corporate Social Responsibility

The phrase "commitment to promoting the well-being of the community through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources" is used to describe corporate social responsibility. An organization has made a long-term commitment to conduct business operations ethically. CSR involves combining economic growth goals with ethics in order to foster a sense of support and community that results in social change, rather than just generating money for charitable causes. A healthy and pleasant workplace for employees has become a way for many firms to live out their commitment to CSR. It has been noted that CSR has been ingrained in many firms' daily operations, and these organizations are now benefiting both directly and indirectly from its practical effects on employee wellbeing. In their

study, Kim, Woo, Uysal, and Kwon (2018) came to the conclusion that businesses actively involve good corporate citizens in programmes that advance the welfare and kindness of their employees. Additionally, it is suggested by Farooq, Payaud, Merunka, and Valette-Florence (2014) that a firm that supports CSR efforts shows its investors that it cares about the community, the environment, and its workers.

2.2) Environmental Awareness

The phrase "knowledge about the influence of human behaviour on the environment" is used to describe environmental awareness (Afsar et al., 2016; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). It is essentially a unique response to ecological issues. The first step to becoming a green customer is becoming aware of environmental issues. It has cognitive, emotional, and conative components, making it a multidimensional phrase (Dembkowski & Hanmer-Lloyd, 1994). According to Chan and Hawkins (2010), an individual's heightened knowledge of the environment and comprehension of the system promotes awareness about the environment, and because of this awareness, they applied that understanding to their daily lives.

2.3) Employee Green Behavior

Employee green behaviour is defined as behaviour that is done in a way that is environmentally friendly (Unsworth, Dmitrieva, & Adriasola, 2013). Green behaviour is the act of acting in a way that is friendly to the environment in order to carry out work. One of the many tactics used by organizations to improve their environmental performance and hit sustainable goals is engaging in green behaviour.

3) Methodology

3.1) Sampling

This study's foundation is a qualitative analysis of the involvement of 20 semi-structured interviews. Due to the exploratory character of the study, a qualitative technique was chosen (Yin, 2009). The main objective of the study was to explore about the green policies of the organization and the reaction of voluntary behaviour of the employees on the same. We have chosen students transitioning to management positions having at least two years of



prior work experience. The agenda behind choosing this sample was understanding responses at the individual levels focusing on how individuals perceive and act in response to environmental concerns with special reference to their respective organizations. These transitioning managers have had an experience from 2-5 years in range across

diversified organizations like banking, manufacturing, startups and the service industry. All these respondents have been grouped between the age of 25-32 years with different cultural backgrounds. An overview of the classification is presented in Table

Gender	Age	Experience	Culture	Organization
Males- 55% Females- 45%	(25-27)- 35% (27-29)- 22% (29-31)- 27% (31-32)- 16%	< 2 Years- 48% (2-3) Years- 26% (3-4) Years- 23% (4-5) Years- 3%	Individual- 30% Collective- 70% Rural/Urban	Banks- 15% Startups-20% Manufacturing-10% Service-20% Retail-10% Electronics-10% E-Commerce-5% IT-10%

3.2) Data Collection

The data have been gathered through semi-structured interviews with students transitioning to management positions having at least two years of prior work experience. We conducted interviews with 20 respondents, lasting, on average, 30 to 40 minutes. The development of an interview guide included questions about the organizations, work experiences of the respondents, environmental carbon footprints, organizational carbon footprints, organizational green policies, key influencers, incentivization of green policies and their green behaviours. The interviewing process was made flexible by the open-ended questions in the interview guide. The interviewees from each respondent were chosen as a sample based on their understanding of environmental sustainability and awareness. The interviews lasted for 30 to 40 minutes. All interviews were taped and written down. To prevent any unsuitability for the respondents, we also emailed a participation invitation and information sheet 2-3 days before conducting the interviews. We revisited the respondents after the interviews were transcribed to discuss the early findings, which were then presented, reviewed, and validated, and new data was gathered.

3.3) Analysis

Each embedded respondent's description served as the foundation for our investigation. The gathered data was then coded using topics from the literature linked to sharing and business models as a guide. In this manner, we were able to add themes from our data while still ensuring a connection to earlier literature (i.e., existing policy, incentivization of new policy, boundaries & spaces and personal contextual variation). These three steps were involved in the coding (Gioia et al., 2013). First, we sorted the data into first-order codes using open coding (see Figure 2). Based on the empirical information we gathered from each respondent, the open codes were descriptive and illustrative. Second-order themes were created by grouping these codes together. The questions were grouped into why, how, who, where, and when. Throughout our empirical research, these queries remained a recurrent theme. The aggregated dimension supporting the second-order themes was then developed. Our data's structure and coding are shown in Figure 2. As we analyzed our data, we alternated between clusters and categories, going back over information and creating new categories to better describe the topics of our study.

1st order concepts (Should not be complicated) Max 7-10 words	2nd order themes (Substitute these with jargonised versions)	Aggregate Dimensions (Substitute these with jargonised versions)
Policy has been made somewhere, but has not been communicated well We don't know whether there is any green policy or not Policy is important but somewhat missing There is nothing such as green policy	Awareness about policies	Existing Policy
Companies give 2% as CSR in green policy Green policy- "You mean CSR activities in organization" Our company visits to NGO's to increase awareness about environment Our company focuses a lot on CSR initiatives	Clarity about difference between CSR and Green policies	
Efforts to be put on social media does not lead to increase in motivation	Existing non-monetary incentives inadequate to motivate green behaviour	
We focus more on routine tasks. We don't get time to pursue extra things apart from day-to-day tasks. Main work gets more attention	KPA based tasks prioritized over green tasks	
I don't feel much about these incentives These incentives don't bother me much My organization doesn't have any such thing like that I don't appreciate monetary stuff for any policy	Don't care Don't want policy (Even monetary)	
Incentives don't matter for us, irrespective of any type	Even monetary or non-monetary incentives wouldn't matter	
Nobody forces me to adopt green behaviour	Keep green behaviours voluntary and free-flowing	
My company should provide me support, then maybe i can think Time is a constraint, if my company can provide me extra time	Conditional Voluntarily	
In WFH, I do certain green acts as asked in office but to a very low extent	Green spaces blur in voluntary	Boundaries and Spaces
Let voluntary green behaviours not be linked with our KPI's. I do tasks from different perspective and green from different perspective Sometimes really get confused between how to differentiate between the two	Rigid silos between task & voluntary green behaviours are undesired	
Going to NGOs and teach children about environment I love going teaching at NGOs My company send me to NGO's as part of CSR to increase awareness about the environment	Partner antecedents as NGO's green boundaries and spaces	

4. Empirical findings

4.1) Awareness of Policy

A policy is a set of rules, values, concepts, or frameworks that an organization adopts or creates in order to accomplish long-term objectives. These are typically presented in an easily accessible written style. All important decisions inside the organization are directed and influenced by policies, which also serve to maintain all actions within predetermined bounds. The most crucial finding that comes across in the analysis part is from the policy formulation. For any organization, policy acts as a guideline to an organization which involves what to do and what not to do as it is made up of various rules and regulations that must be abided by the employees. These rules help employees to align in a common direction and to meet its organizational strategic intent i.e., mission, vision, goals and objectives. When it comes to the green policy, 80% of the respondents feel that there can be a chance that some green policy could have been formulated but the organization has failed to create awareness about that policy as an employee said that “Policy has been made somewhere, but has not been communicated well to us”. Most of them feel that green policy is very much significant for any organization as it focuses on building sustainability but is somewhat missing because of a lack of communication from the policymakers. Few respondents are of the opinion that “there is nothing such as green policy” because they have not heard about it before and also if heard then they have not seen these policies implemented.

4.2) Clarity about the difference between CSR and Green Policies

Another major finding that comes into the picture is an ambiguity in understanding the concepts of CSR and taking certain green initiatives. Most of the respondents are having the perception that CSR activities and environmentally friendly green initiatives or green policy formulation come under the same umbrella. Almost 90% of the respondents have general awareness about norms of CSR as they know “companies give 2 % as CSR in green policy” but there is a lack of clarity in the above statement as literature also supports that CSR activities and green policies in the organization are two different

aspects, so yes companies give 2% as CSR but not in particular reference to green initiatives. When we asked the respondents about prevailing green policy, there is a linkage of green policy with CSR activities “Our company focuses a lot on CSR initiatives”. Though few respondents highlighted that their organization sends them to different NGOs to increase awareness about securing the environment, which can be considered part of green policy.

4.3) Existing non-monetary incentives inadequate to motivate green behavior

As per our other finding, there are very few organizations which have certain policies on providing certain non-monetary incentives while performing green initiatives which include employee recognition on the organization’s social media platforms like LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook etc. According to the perception of respondents, this recognition initiative by the organization is not at all necessary for these green initiatives and should be held voluntarily without any incentivization. The fame and recognition behind these initiatives will not make them sustainable for the long term as if organizations stop doing this recognition, the employees will also stop doing these activities.

4.4) KPA-based tasks prioritized over green tasks

Our finding shows that more focus has been made on the daily tasks which have been linked with the direct key performance indicators of employees. Respondents couldn’t get enough time to indulge in green initiatives because of a lack of time. As one respondent answered that “we don’t get time to pursue extra things apart from day-to-day tasks. Approximately 30% of respondents focus more on routine tasks and their main work gets more attention. Their immediate supervisors and bosses ask them to prioritize things where firstly they have to focus on their routine jobs and then they can think of doing any other stuff and otherwise not.

4.5) Not at all bothered about incentivization

In our findings, some respondents highlighted that they are not concerned with whether or not their organization is involving incentives in green initiatives or not. They feel that they are so much involved in the normal day-to-day routine tasks that they are left with no time to think about anything

else. Some respondents answered that their organization doesn't have any green policies as answered "My organization doesn't have any such thing like that". This has left us with a very crucial aspect to figure out about the sustainability of the organizations as either there are no green policies in the organization or employees are not even bothered to know about them.

4.6) Monetary as well as Non-Monetary Incentives don't matter

Our findings indicate that if the organization is planning to incentivize these green policies in both monetary as well as non-monetary terms, both of these aspects don't matter to them as they feel that preserving the environment is something which is prominent for their future generation and because of increasing usage of organizational carbon footprints, these concerns are demarcated as a red flag and organizations should focus on bringing the certain rules and regulations which will help in reducing these carbon footprints instead of focusing on incentivizing.

4.7) Keep green behavior voluntary and free flowing

Respondents feel that all the green initiatives done by the employees should be made voluntary and not mandatory. As per our research, all those who pursue green initiatives in the organization are results of two dimensions-one who has an immense passion to initiate these activities in order to preserve the environment and second who are influenced by someone like grandparents, parents, teachers, friends or celebrities. Both these aspects resulted in voluntary green behavior and thus don't require an incentivized policy to conduct the same. These policies should be kept voluntary as this will bring in more sustainability for the organization.

4.8) Conditional Voluntarily

As per our findings, the respondents feel that even if there is no green policy in the organization, they may initiate in adopting these green policies only if the organization gives them sufficient support to do so in terms of providing resources like giving them time within their working hours and certain financial resources to build up in maintaining effectiveness and efficiency, then they would really like to

perform with these green initiatives. A statement quoted by one of the respondents is "Time is a constraint if my company can provide me extra time, I can think of doing these green initiatives".

4.9) In WFO scenarios, green offices are a bit blur

During the covid times, the complete mode of working has been shifted from physical mode to the remote mode of working where employees were working from their homes. When comparing the green initiatives from the perspectives of working from the office and working from home, it was quite evident that green initiatives were performed to a greater extent while working from home directly or indirectly, for example, switching off lights, fans or maybe utilizing very less usage of paper whereas while working from the office, these initiatives were quite less as there somebody or the other from office staff in conducting these small things.

4.10) Rigid silos between task & voluntary green behavior are undesired

There is quite a confusion in demarcating the line of difference between task-related and voluntary-related green behavior from the perspective of the respondents. One of the respondents answered that "I do tasks from a different perspective and green from a different perspective." Few respondents have argued that they "sometimes really get confused in how to differentiate between the two". If there is a clear demarcation between these two aspects, then there is a possibility that green policy formulation can improvise which will ensure better sustainability for the organization.

4.11) Partner antecedents as NGO's green boundaries and spaces

As per our study, most of the respondents are linking their green organizational policies and practices only with visiting NGOs and increasing awareness about the environment. Instances for the above are in the form of statements like "My company send me to NGOs as part of CSR to increase awareness about the environment". In certain statements, there is a bit of misalignment when it comes to attaching NGOs with green policies, for example as per one respondent "I love going teaching at NGOs". This teaching at different NGOs may or may not align

with green policies and organization needs to ensure these in their policy formation.

Limitation

A major limitation that we have done in this study is choosing the sample size of working professionals from 2-5 years which has narrowed down the scope of the study. If this study includes policymakers of the different organizations along with the employees, then this could bring a bigger perspective altogether.

Conclusion

This study provides insights into the employee's understanding of the relevance of green policies and practices which are necessary for the organization. As the environment in which we are living is facing heavy turmoil because of increasing carbon footprints, there is a need to reduce these organizational carbon footprints as we may not be able to completely eliminate them in the upcoming 10-12 years. We also come to know about different perspectives which influence individual green behaviours from an individual and organizational perspective and how these perspectives help the policymakers to build a green policy which will have a strong impact in making our environment green and sustainable.

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