



# The Psychology Of Sustainable Change In Educational Settings: The Theoretical Conceptualization Of Influence Of Green Leaders On Stakeholder Behavior

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## Abstract

This theoretical conceptualization evaluated the importance of green leadership in bringing about a sustainable change in the educational institutions particularly focusing on the psychological factors influencing the stakeholder behaviour. This framework discusses the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Value-Belief-Norm theory, and Social Identity Theory. This paper also identifies the key characteristics of green leaders that include sustainable knowledge, visionary thinking, effective communication and emotional intelligence. Simultaneously, the challenges are also identified that are faced by the green leaders in implementing the sustainable change.

**Keywords:** *Green leaders, sustainable change, psychological factors, stakeholders, educational institutions*

## 1. Introduction

The education sector plays an important role in the formation of attitudes, values, and behaviour of the children with the prediction of sustainable future. There exists an increased need for addressing the environmental challenges that requires the role of the organizations across the sectors to bring their focus on the initiatives that may bring sustainable change in the society. Green leadership is one aspect that plays an important role in initiating a sustainable change in the society, using which educational institutions can inculcate more eco-friendly practices moving forward (Radhakrishnan & Viswanathan, 2015). Every educational institution has the potential to be the host for bringing the sustainable change where students, the future generations may be empowered and use their full potential to bring in the sustainable change in their professional as well as personal lives. The main responsibility for the success of these sustainability

initiatives is in the hand of the green leaders who involve themselves and mobilize the stakeholders with the same vision of bringing that sustainable change (Buono & Kerber, 2010).

### 1.1. The importance of sustainability in educational settings

Educational settings play an important role in impacting the communities in various ways in different dimensions like environmental, social, and economic aspects (Wang & Degol, 2016). These institutions consume energy, generates waste, and use the resources on daily basis that may hinder the sustainable growth. However, the education provided in these institutions may influence the awareness and the students' mindset towards the sustainability and become leaders as they can bring a positive change in the society (Roscoe et al., 2019).

### 1.2. The role of green leaders in driving sustainable change

Green leadership generally focuses on the strategies, approaches, and competencies that might be adopted by the leaders of the institution to incorporate more eco-friendly sustainable practices. However, in educational settings, the tasks that the green leaders are imbued with are finding unique challenges that helps the institution in following a sustainability-oriented culture (KARDOYO et al., 2020).

Strong environmental values, visionary thinking, effective communication skills, empathy, systems thinking, and a collaborative leadership style are just a few of the traits and competencies that distinguish effective green leaders (Blok et al., 2015; Francoeur et al., 2021; Ramdhani et al., 2017). Green leaders may engage stakeholders in participating sustainable practices and overcoming the challenges of organizational change.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The psychological factors that influence the stakeholder behaviour also play an important role as once these have been taken care of it becomes easy to overcome the challenges faced by them especially their attitudes and belief (Zhu et al., 2016), their willingness to change and engaging in the sustainability initiatives also influences their behaviour towards the change (Blok et al., 2015; Lozano et al., 2015). Their motivation and the resistance to change also become another factor that influences their engagement towards these green initiatives (Francoeur et al., 2021; Warwick et al., 2017).

### 2.1. Psychological Theories related to sustainable behavior change

#### *Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)*

The Theory of Planned Behaviour states the intention of an individual to perform a specific behaviour which is impacted by certain factors namely, attitude, social norms, and self-efficacy. Similarly, the green leaders have the potential to influence the behaviour of the stakeholder as they help in shaping and imbibing the positive attitude, create norms and provides support in enhancing the ability of an individual to bring in a positive sustainable change.

*Value-Belief-Norm Theory (Stern, 1999)*

The Value-Belief-Norm theory stated that any behaviour is a result of personal values that may influence anyone's actions and shape the personal norms accordingly. This theory lays immense emphasis on the moral sense that develops in an individual that may motivate the individual to indulge into sustainable behaviour.

*Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)*

Social Identity Theory says that individuals identify themselves with the social groups and this provided them with the sense of self-worth. Similar concept can be seen in the green leaders where they have a profound sense of self-worth and group identity and enjoy celebrating collaborative achievements by promoting sustainable changes in the society.

## 2.2. Leadership Theories and sustainability

*Transformational Leadership (Bass, 1985)*

Transformational leadership holds a vision for the future of the society where they encourage innovation and showcases a deep commitment towards sustainable development that would benefit to the society and promotes collaborative work towards the change in the society.

*Authentic Leadership (Luthans & Avolio, 2003)*

Authentic leadership helps in building the trust and credibility factor towards the sustainability with the collaborative effort of the stakeholders, where they follow these authentic leaders. These green leaders create the environment, which is ethical, authentic and holds integrity around sustainability.

*Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1977)*

Servant Leaders who lead with love are motivated by love and also serve their followers with love. The strength of this love is so strong that it has the power to change the lives of followers, organization and even the lives of leaders as well. Greenleaf (1977) also suggested that one cannot love the abstraction called organization; one can only love people who work for the organization.

## 3. Characteristics of Green Leaders in Educational Settings

Green leaders hold certain characteristics that are unique and help them in making effective decisions about the sustainable change and are different from the traditional leaders (Hargreaves & Fink, 2012). They show commitment towards the sustainable changes in the society and maintain this culture in the educational institutions (Maki, 2023). They also tend to inspire others to put in effort in a more sustainable future.

### 3.1. Key Competencies of Green leadership

*Sustainability knowledge and awareness*

Green leaders happen to have a holistic understanding about the concept of sustainability that may not just be confined to the environmental concerns, however, they also possess the understanding of the

social justice and well-being of the society on a whole that impacts the operations in the educational institutions (Heizmann & Liu, 2018).

#### *Visionary thinking and strategic planning*

Green leaders are strategic planners who can convert their visions and plans into actual actions and motivated enough to implement the strategies for a sustainable future for the educational institutions (Chen & Chang, 2013).

#### *Effective Communication and stakeholder engagement*

Green leaders are good communicators who can convince stakeholders about the benefits of the sustainable measure effectively, also interest various segments of the audience that may include the students, faculty and staff from the educational institutions (Allen, 2016).

#### *Empathy and emotional intelligence*

Green leaders showcase the qualities like empathy and emotional intelligence that help them establish strong relationship with the stakeholders and can deal with complex situations. They tend to maintain optimism and can motivate others even when the situations are difficult (Saha et al., 2023).

### 4. Influence of Green Leaders on Stakeholder Behaviour

Green leaders have the qualities that influences other people in a very positive manner. They can convince the stakeholders with their promising attributes, and effective tactics available that may help in inspiring these stakeholders for indulging in sustainable behaviour in the educational institutions (Robertson & Barling, 2013).

#### 4.1. Key stakeholders in educational settings

The key stakeholders in any educational setting are as follows:

##### *Students*

They are the most important and primary stakeholders who benefit the most from implementation of sustainable change in the educational institutions, therefore they are the most important stakeholders who can be influenced by the green leaders.

##### *Faculty and Staff*

Green leaders can provide the faculty and staff with appropriate trainings so that they may influence the students and can be involved in the decision-making process for brining a change in planning the sustainable development of the educational institutions.

#### 4.2. Strategies employed by Green Leaders to influence stakeholder behaviour

There are various strategies used by Green Leaders to influence the stakeholder behaviour to create a sustainable culture in the educational institutions.

##### *Raising awareness and education*

The awareness can be raised by resources and the employ certain educational programs like courses with the focus on teaching sustainability, workshops, trainings, seminars, etc.

##### *Fostering a sustainable culture*

The sustainable culture can be initiated by developing certain policies that are focused on sustainable measures, can be implemented while evaluating performance and keeping rewards systems on initiating or involving the sustainable measure.

#### *Encouraging participation and ownership*

Green Leaders can bring in a change by influencing the stakeholders for motivating them to create the opportunities for participating in the sustainable measures and taking the ownership as well.

### 5. Challenges and barriers to Sustainable change in educational settings

Bringing in a sustainable change in educational setting is a very challenging process, as these institutions face certain obstacles that may hinder the implementation of the sustainable measures. Therefore, it comes very important to understand the nature of these challenges that would help in implementing and sustaining the change.

#### 5.1. Resistance to change and status quo bias

One of the major challenges faced in the educational setting in bringing about a sustainable change is the resistance to change and maintaining the status quo. There are certain people who hesitate in adopting new measure for anything which hinders the appropriate implementation of the required measures.

#### 5.2. Limited resources and competing priorities

Educational institutions at times have budget constraints due to which very limited resources are made available that become a potential challenge towards adopting the sustainable measures as these sustainable projects do require investments. Another challenge is the competing priorities, as the sustainable measures are not mostly in the top-most priorities then it becomes very difficult to carry out any project which has sustainable goals.

### 6. Future Directions and Implication

Green leaders are required to look for new opportunities, challenges and new trends that helps in the development of sustainability change attitudes in the educational settings.

#### 6.1. Emerging trends in sustainability leadership in education

##### *Increasing focus on climate action*

With the growing problems due to the climate change because of the carbon footprint, it will be necessary for the green leaders to give utmost priority to bring the sustainable change, adapt to the climate change and use the limited energy resources with efficiency.

##### *Growing emphasis on social justice and equity*

It is of immense importance that the green leaders should take a rigorous approach towards adopting the sustainable measures that would include the intersectional approach that can resolve the issues of race, class, gender, and various other forms of inequality which may be a mediating factor between the environmental sustainability and social justice.

##### *Shift towards systems thinking and interdisciplinarity*

Sustainability aspects are complex and interconnected in nature that includes certain traditional approach as well. The green leaders should encourage an interdisciplinary approach in research, teaching and

problem solving which will in turn help in the more cooperation between the academic departments and the administrations of the educational institutions.

#### *Emphasis on experiential and applied learning*

Educational institutions are required to provide more chances to the students to gain more practical experience that will help them in learning about the sustainable measures. The green leaders can be very much beneficial as they are equipped with the strategies that will help them in collaborating with the outside groups and help them get the appropriate trainings, internships, etc.

#### *Integration of technology and data-driven decision-making*

The development in the technology and the data analytics helps in the opening of new aspects for the green leaders that may help in improving the sustainable development in the educational systems which will also help in informing the predictive analytics that signifies that it will promote the decision-making which is evidence based.

### 7. Conclusion

This paper concludes by highlighting the critical role that green leadership plays in shaping stakeholder behavior and promoting long-term transformation in academic institutions. The successful green leaders have a distinct set of traits and skills, use focused tactics to involve and inspire stakeholders, and consider the psychological aspects that affect environmentally friendly behavior. The major focus lies in the successful implementation of sustainable goals in the education sector. The green leadership holds immense importance as these sustainable changes are brought in by the leaders and addressing the challenges faced. This paper has also revealed that educational institutions can be important host that can bring in the successful sustainable changes, therefore increasing the green leadership practices for a sustainable future.

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