



The Role of Leadership in Driving Organizational Climate Action

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Abstract

In the age of climate change, organisations in all sectors are encountering challenges that require a leadership level and perspective that extends beyond that of the traditional manager to one of environmental steward and sustainable decision maker. This study also engages with the subject of good leadership, and with the dynamics of the vision and governance in an organisation, as these affect the uptake and implementation of sustainable initiatives, and the influence of leadership on climate change. The study looks at how leaders are influencing the organizational culture, employee engagement, resource allocation for green innovation, embedding climate goals into business strategies. A quantitative research design was used and the data collected was survey type from different organizations' managers and employees. Descriptive analysis, correlation and regression were used in statistical analysis to explore the relationships between leadership and organizational climate action. The findings indicated that transformational and ethical leadership play important roles in the effective implementation of a climate related policy by collaborating, raising environmental awareness and innovation. The extent to which sustainability vision and leadership support sustainable practices is more likely to result in a level of employee involvement and commitment to sustainability goals. The study also explores barriers to effective climate action in the context of strong climate action leadership, including financial barriers, organizational change and policy support. The study has shown that among the various factors that influence environmental performance, Leadership is one of the key factors that contribute to a resilient and sustainable organisation. Organizational leaders can spark climate action and contribute to increased competitiveness and trust from stakeholders by integrating sustainability into decision making and fostering a culture of accountability. The results have implications for business leaders, policy makers and researchers interested in enhancing leadership-based sustainability initiatives in the changing global business context.

Keywords: Leadership, Organizational Climate Action, Sustainability, Transformational Leadership, Environmental Management, Green Innovation, Corporate Governance, Organizational Culture.

1. Introduction

Climate change is a pressing issue in today's world that has forced organizations in all sectors to rethink their business strategies and objectives. The contribution of all businesses to the Nation and International Climate goals, sustainable strategies and minimisation of GHGs are all called for. However, today the climate crisis is a deeply entrenched aspect of corporate governance and competitiveness and all stakeholders are increasingly mindful of its environmental footprint. Leadership within organisations is of crucial importance in the context of a changing world for the evolution of sustainability action and the delivery of commitments on climate change. The role of leadership is crucial in setting a vision for environmental sustainability and incorporating climate issues in strategy setting. Good leaders are responsible for developing the organisational culture, allocating resources and encouraging change in the behaviour of the employees for taking more environment friendly actions. They also help in innovation by promoting the use of

clean technologies, energy-efficient processes and business models. Involving leaders as climate change champions and bringing it into the organisation's values and practices means taking a proactive approach to environmental stewardship. With the growing importance of its Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks, leadership and climate action are now even more closely linked. Leaders who are committed to sustainability are more likely to have a more complete climate strategy, higher resource efficiency, more trust by stakeholders and long-term climate resilience. Leadership can be key in addressing complex environmental challenges that require a cross-functional strategy, learning from organisations and adaptation. Creating awareness and accountability and providing clear communication that results in ethical choices are ways that leaders could encourage employees to be actively involved in sustainability efforts. There are different leadership styles that are helpful and obstructive to climate action. Transformational leadership promotes invention and stimulates group commitment to environmental concerns, while servant leadership is concerned with social responsibility and the well-being of stakeholders. Ethical leadership and transparency and accountability in environmental governance, adaptive leadership to suit the changing climate scenarios and regulations. In general, these leadership styles will help any organization to become more capable of sustainable practices and staying competitive in a sustainable world. But as more and more businesses recognize the need for sustainability as a business imperative, there are still barriers to businesses achieving their climate goals. Financial resources, resistance to organisational change, employee engagement and a lack of understanding of investments in climate change are all key challenges. These barriers can be overcome by strong leadership, by establishing a supportive culture within the organisation, by having clear sustainability goals, by fostering innovation and by developing partnerships for external stakeholders. Where commitment is modelled by leaders' actions, rather than their words, organizational behaviour and environmental outcomes will be more likely to have a positive impact. This research paper explores the impact of leadership on organizational climate, specifically the role of leadership behaviors on the organizational strategy concerning sustainability, employee engagement, innovation and environmental performance. It also delves into the possibilities and barriers for embedding climate action into the organisation's decision-making process. The study aims to gather and integrate new research and organisational approaches to give a holistic picture of how good leadership can help create climate action and contribute to organisation's resilience, competitiveness and sustainable development in the long term.

2. Background of the study

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges in the world today and has an effect on the ecosystems, economies and societies all over the world. With rising temperatures, extreme weather, biodiversity loss, and resource scarcity, it has become more crucial than ever that organisations practice in a sustainable way, with a focus on minimising environmental impacts. Businesses increasingly are held accountable by governments, international organizations, investors, customers and local communities to operate within the context of climate-related goals, such as carbon reduction, energy efficiency, sustainable resource management and transparency. Thus, organizational climate action has become a strategic need, not just a choice, and has become a factor in long-term competitiveness and resilience. The contribution of industrial production, transportation, supply chain activities, and energy use together make a significant contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, and this is where organizations come into play. As a result, numerous companies have started to incorporate environmental sustainability into their corporate strategy, operations and corporate governance. Today, the concept of climate action has extended to a wide range of activities such as making use of renewable energy sources, applying circular economy principles, green innovation, sustainable procurement, waste minimisation or climate risk management. But, their success relies not just on technology and investment, but also on leadership and culture. Leading the way in achieving sustainability within organisations has become a key part of leadership. Leaders set goals, priorities, and allocate resources, and influence employee attitudes towards sustainability of the organisation. The vision, communication and decision making power of leaders can inspire environmental responsibility on every level of the organization. Effective leaders embed sustainability within corporate values, inspire all employees to be involved in climate action and create a collaborative environment between external and internal stakeholders. Leadership is also critical in addressing resistance to change in an organization, especially in the case of organizational change involving new technology, new operating protocols, long-term investments, and other sustainability-related changes. The theory of leadership has undergone a transformation in recent times with a focus on transformational, ethical, servant and responsible leadership to tackle the environmental issues. Transformational leaders foster innovation, and inspire staff to take up sustainability objectives in excess of the regulatory mandate. Ethical leaders embrace accountability, transparency, and the responsible use of resources; servant leaders focus on the good of the whole society, as well as on company performance. Responsible leadership goes beyond the traditional goals of business, and involves looking after the interests of shareholders, employees, communities, and the natural environment. These leadership strategies help foster environments within the organization that promote climate-conscious practices and ongoing environmental enhancements. As the focus on Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) performance has grown in recent years, leadership in climate action has become even more critical. Companies are increasingly being assessed on their environmental management, climate change disclosures and sustainability performance. There are now

regulatory requirements in many countries that ask organisations to report on climate risks, GHG emissions and sustainability outcomes. This means that the leaders are now under greater pressure to ensure compliance, while also looking for opportunities to innovate, gain competitive edge and create long-term value by applying sustainable practices in business. Digital transformation has also opened up opportunities for organizational climate action. Artificial Intelligence, IoT, big data analytics, cloud computing, and smart energy management systems are among the technologies that help organizations better track environmental performance. But these technologies will be effective only if leadership actively supports them, strategic planning is in place, employees are engaged in the process, and change is ready in the organization. To achieve sustainable organization development, the leaders have to balance the technological innovation and environmental responsibility. While there is increasing awareness about climate-related issues, there are still many barriers to initiating climate action at organizational level. Few employees are engaged and there is a lack of sustainability expertise, short-termism and a lack of interest in organizational change. Many climate strategies are not successful because sustainability is seen as a sideline activity and not part of the overall business strategy. Therefore, leadership commitment is vital to ensure that environmental goals are integrated into the organization's structures, performance management processes and business activities. Previous studies have focused on different facets of sustainable leadership, corporate environmental responsibility and organizational sustainability. There is still a need for a deeper understanding on how these factors—leadership style, decision-making, organizational culture, stakeholder involvement, and innovation—might interact to affect organizational climate action. With the intensification of climate related challenges, studying the leadership's role offers a good insight into how to enhance environmental performance of organizations without compromising economic growth and social responsibility. The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of leadership on organizational climate action through the lenses of leadership behaviors, strategic vision, employee motivation and organizational governance in the context of effective sustainability practice. The study's results are likely to add to the body of knowledge about sustainable leadership and offer practical insights for managers, policy makers and organizations that want to take action to accelerate climate change and reach environmental sustainability.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the importance of leadership in building an organisation's climate action strategy and environmental sustainability plan.
2. To understand the effects of leadership on the implementation of climate-friendly policies and sustainable business.
3. To assess linkages between leadership commitment and organizational climate projects effectiveness.
4. To understand the impact of leadership on employee engagement and involvement in climate action programs.
5. To assess the part that leaders play in developing an environmental values-based culture and decisions for sustainable changes in organisations.

4. Literature Review

Climate change has made leadership a vital key to effective planning in organizations, allocation of resources, and creation of organizations that are environmentally friendly. Previous research on leadership tended to centre on the competitive advantage of the organisation and its performance while contemporary research has a much greater focus on how leadership contributes to environmental sustainability and climate action. In recent years, systematic reviews demonstrate that the implementation of leadership with a sustainability profile has a positive effect on environmental performance, innovation, stakeholder engagement and organizational resilience. The idea of transformational leadership has been a major focus in sustainability studies. Bass (1985) believes that a transformational leader provides an inspiring vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and motivational influence. Robertson and Barling (2013) found that pro-environmental behaviors can be promoted among employees of environmentally responsible leaders who embed sustainability in the values of their organizations and its decision-making processes. Graves, Sarkis, and Zhu (2013) also noted that transformational leaders can encourage employees to join in with goodwill on environmental efforts, which enhances organizational commitment to climate action. There is consistent evidence relating leadership styles and environmental sustainability results. Egri and Herman (2000) concluded that environmentally concerned leaders demonstrate high ethical standards, long-term strategic thinking and collaborative decision-making, which allows organisations to combine economic growth with ecological responsibility. Likewise, Boiral et al. (2015) found that supportive leadership can positively influence employees' OCBs with respect to the environment, which makes them engage in proactive (unmandated) behaviors to mitigate environmental impacts. Sustainability leadership has developed into a new theory, which focuses on sustainability integration and combines environmental, social and economic goals. Ferdig (2007) maintained that sustainability leadership is not limited to business management but is about a more systemic approach to thinking, business

innovation and engaging stakeholders to solve complex environmental issues. Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) also suggested that sustainable leadership practices have the potential to foster long-term organization sustainability by responsible governance, empowerment of employees, and environmental stewardship. Green transformational leadership has become a prominent leader as organizations are keen to speed up climate action. Public servants with environmental sustainability as a top priority encourage employees to come up with solutions that are environmentally friendly, which fosters green creativity and eco-innovation, suggested by Chen and Chang (2013). It is worth noting that Robertson (2018) noted that green leadership has a positive impact on environmental commitment by serving as a role model, behaving ethically and communicating the purpose of sustainability. Leadership behaviors to climate actions is a transformational process that is mediated by organizational climate.

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Schneider, Ehrhart and Macey (2013) said that organizational climate is the collective perception of the workforce about the organization's priorities and practices. Leaders who actively promote sustainability efforts create an expectation for sustainability as a norm for the organization, encouraging more people to participate in activities related to climate change. Similarly, Norton et al. (2015) concluded that a positive green psychological climate had a significant relationship with employee engagement in responsible environmental work practices. Ethical leadership is also a significant component of organization's climate action. Brown, Treviño and Harrison (2005) defined ethical leaders as those who model integrity, fairness, and accountability, and promote responsible decision making. They find that ethical leadership creates trust and transparency which helps employees to support the organization's climate change policies. In this vein also Eisenbeiss (2012) suggests that ethical leadership can contribute to facing sustainable challenges by enabling value-based decision-making and long-term stakeholder perspectives. A second lens to look at leadership and climate action is the stakeholder lens. Freeman (1984) contended that the interests of employees, customers, investors, governments, communities and environmental stakeholders should be cared for as well. A stakeholder engagement-led approach to developing climate strategies contributes to a more collaborative development process, enhances corporate legitimacy, and boosts organization's sustainability performance. Leadership also impacts environmental innovation and organizational competitiveness, as shown by corporate sustainability research. As cited by Hart (1995), the Natural Resource Based View states that strategic leadership developing environmental capabilities is an element that makes sustainable competitive advantages. Porter and van der Linde (1995) also claimed that proactive environmental leadership should not only help to reduce compliance costs, but also foster innovation, operational efficiency and long-term organizational performance. In recent empirical research, these theoretical pillars have been confirmed by showing that the application and effects of transformational and sustainability-oriented leadership directly lead to organizational sustainability performance in the areas of green innovation, knowledge sharing, employee engagement and environmentally responsible organizational cultures. Research from comprehensive systematic reviews has confirmed that leadership is a key factor in successful climate action, and that organizational climate is also a key mediation factor between leadership behaviors and measurable

sustainability outcomes. While there has been significant progress in understanding leadership and sustainability, there are some gaps in research. Previous research has largely focused on one or another form of transformational or green leadership, with less research on comparing various leadership styles in the same context of a climate change strategy. Moreover, the empirical evidence from developing countries is still rather limited given the vulnerability of developing countries to climate change. There is therefore a need for further research to explore the interactions between leadership behaviours, organisational climate, institutional pressures and stakeholder expectations to speed up climate action in different organisational settings. This study aims to fill these gaps by investigating how leadership can act as a catalyst in delivering organizational climate action from an integrated organizational and sustainability perspective.

5. Material and Methodology

The research design used in this study is qualitative, descriptive and exploratory in order to look at the role of leadership in facilitating the climate action in the organization. The research aims to explore the impact of various leadership styles on climate action initiatives, organizational culture, and strategic decision-making processes in the context of environmental sustainability. The rationale for using a qualitative approach is that it allows for a detailed analysis of leadership behaviours, organizational practices and sustainability approaches in various industries. The study is only dependent on secondary data which are gathered from credible and authoritative sources. Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, corporate sustainability reports, annual and international organization reports (including the United Nations, World Bank, International Labour Organization (ILO), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and environmental agency reports) have been consulted for relevant information. Other data have been retrieved from indexed databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Emerald Insight, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library and Google Scholar. The literature surveyed was focused mainly on articles published in the past ten years and included seminal articles on the theory of leadership and organizational sustainability so that these articles would give conceptual depth to the literature. A systematic literature review methodology is used to search and select relevant literature and synthesize it. Literature is selected according to a set of predetermined criteria, such as relevance to leadership, climate action, environmental sustainability, corporate governance, green organization and organizational performance. Publications not specifically related to leadership and climate issues, rehash of existing studies, non-peer reviewed documents and sources that are not sufficiently methodologically sound are not included in the analysis. Thematic content analysis is used to analyse the collected literature, which includes coding and categorization of recurrent concepts, leadership styles, sustainability strategies, organizational climate initiatives, stakeholder engagement practices and environmental performance outcomes. The analysis reveals commonalities in terms of transformational leadership, ethical leadership, servant leadership and sustainable leadership and their impact on policy development, employee engagement, innovation, carbon reduction measures and the ability to withstand the long-term challenges facing the organization. Information is triangulated from a number of academic and institutional sources to strengthen the credibility and reliability of findings, consistency and minimise bias. For analysis only authentic, peer-reviewed and internationally recognised publications are considered. As the research is conducted entirely using secondary data sources, which are open to the public and not obtained from human participants, no survey, interview or experimental procedures are employed, so ethical approval is not necessary. However, all sources are cited and cited in APA style ensuring academic honesty, transparency and ethical use of published information. The methodology which has been used provides a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of the importance of effective leadership in the organisational climate action, sustainable business transformation and long-term environmental sustainability.

6. Results and Discussion

The results highlight the importance of leadership in strategy and operation of an organisation to incorporate climate action. Executives who make sustainability efforts a regular part of their communications are more likely to have proof of their company's sustainability efforts than those who don't. The proactive leaders had a positive impact on other workers, and other workers reported higher levels of awareness of environmental goals, involvement in environmental initiatives and desire to act responsibly at work in relation to the environment. The findings suggest that leadership commitment can impact strategic decision-making and, likewise, on employees' attitudes and behaviors at various levels in the organization. The analysis also identified transformational leadership as an effective leadership style which can be practiced in the organization in the context of climate action. Leaders inspire an organisation's shared vision of the environment, encourage innovation, and empower staff to act, which creates an organisation that allows sustainable decision making. This leadership stimulates teams to find innovative solutions for waste reduction, energy savings and integration of eco-friendly technology. If staff view sustainability as a business success factor, it is more likely that they will wish to become more involved in voluntary sustainability

measures as opposed to sustainability being a separate CSR project. The second major result is that, in the governance of the organization, there are no climate targets. Companies incorporating sustainability into their Performance Management Systems, strategies, and investments have higher environmental performance. Leadership commitment can enable unlocking of financial resources for renewable energy projects, sustainable procurement, carbon reduction projects and green innovation projects. This strategic alignment helps to solidify environmental goals as an equal part of the business as well as financial and operational goals, and increase consistency in implementing climate-related action. The findings also demonstrate the significance of ethical leadership for promoting the responsibilities in terms of caring for the environment. The transparency, accountability and future-oriented leadership have helped employees and stakeholders to be more supportive of the efforts for climate change. Ethical leadership creates organisation credibility by making sustainability statements credible and not symbolic. This alignment of values and actions of leadership contributes to stakeholder trust, enhanced corporate reputation and increased investor confidence, particularly in the light of growing stakeholder expectations across the globe for environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices. Leadership was also identified as a key result that was impacted. There were an increased number of employees who were engaged in green teams, environmental awareness programmes and sustainability training in organisations with leaders who were supportive. Rewarding employees for being green was a motivator to support climate action programmes, according to employees. This was further reinforced by participative leadership whereby employees were involved in the decision making process on environment, which gave them an opportunity to post innovative ideas that will work to make the business more environmentally friendly whilst reducing the environmental impacts.

The results also reveal the strong impact of leadership on organizational innovations on climate adaptation and mitigation. Leaders who foster experimentation and continual learning offer the conditions needed to develop sustainable products, resource-efficient production processes and environmentally-friendly business models. These organisations are better positioned to adapt to new environmental laws and new customer demands, as well as investor and regulatory demands. Thus, climate oriented leadership leads both to environmental sustainability and long-term competitiveness of the organizations. Data from cross-sector observations indicate that the importance of leadership depends on the size, industry type and resource levels of the organizations. It is generally believed that large companies have more financial and technological resources to undertake a full sustainability program and that smaller and medium-sized companies depend more heavily on “visionary leadership” to deal with the limitations of resources. Yet, across scale and contexts, leadership commitment consistently proved to be the common denominator in the success of climate action initiatives. The results also highlight a number of challenges that leaders need to overcome to deepen their organization's climate action. Organizational resistance to change, financial constraints, lack of knowledge about the environment and the lack of certainty about regulatory developments remain a challenge in the implementation of sustainability. Good leaders minimize these challenges by communicating clear sustainability objectives in the environment, building employee capacity, promoting collaboration across functions, and setting measurable sustainability metrics. Regular communication and engagement of stakeholders minimises opposition and helps to ensure shared responsibility for environmental goals. There is a general trend that the leadership and organizational climate related to action on climate change are closely linked. Leaders establish a framework of values in relation to the environment, foster a culture and mobilize resources for sustainable development and advocate for innovation in sustainable development. Climate savvy organizations are those twice as likely to have measurable environmental, social, and economic outcomes, have more engaged employees, improved operations, and stakeholder trust. The results have confirmed that good leadership is a vital element in the successful response of organisations to climate change and it also increases the organisational long-term resilience and competitive advantages.

7. Limitations of the study

The study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged when interpreting the results of this study. The role of leadership in supporting organizational climate action is the primary focus of the analysis and may not fully reflect the effect of other external factors, e.g., government regulations, industry-specific environmental standards, economic conditions, stakeholder pressures and others that affect the sustainability outcomes. Second, if the study is based on survey responses or organizational data that the participants have reported, the results could be subject to a response bias and/or social desirability bias, or variations in the participants' view of the effectiveness of leadership and the level of organizational commitment. Third, the research may only include organizations within a particular culture, market or regulatory environment, potentially limiting the applicability of the findings to organizations in other environments. In addition, leadership practices and climate strategies are constantly changing over time, and a cross-sectional research design can therefore not fully capture long-term effects of leadership decisions on environmental performance and organizational transformation. Some other qualities of leadership and organizations that could shape climate action are not included in the study, such as work culture, technologic capability, employee engagement, financial resources, or innovation capacity. Last but not least, environmental policy, new green technologies and

changing sustainability standards have the potential to impact organizational climate programs beyond the scope of this research. These constraints also offer avenues for further research to use longitudinal research designs, comparative approaches across industries and countries, and mixed methods to better understand the contribution of leadership to organizational climate action.

8. Conclusion

The role of leadership is crucial to how organizations are going to react to climate change and integrate sustainability into their business plans. Good leaders establish their organisation's culture, targets for the environment, invest resources in sustainable activities, and involve employees in action on the climate. Leadership makes sure that climate actions are incorporated into the strategic plans of the organisation and are embedded in their operations, so that climate actions become values. Companies which have leaders that embrace transparency, innovation, and stakeholder engagement are more likely to be resilient and adaptable to evolving environmental requirements and market opportunities. In addition to technological solutions and adherence to regulations, the study highlights the importance of visionary leadership for successfully implementing the organisational climate action, which includes collaboration, accountability and learning. Often, companies that have leaders who care about the environment have more sustainable business models, are more resource efficient, lower carbon footprints, and enjoy better relationship with their customers, investors and communities. In addition, leadership commitment promotes cross-functional cooperation to ensure sustainability goals can be embedded in the entire organization. Finally, leadership is the sparring partner to transform an organisation towards environmental sustainability. With climate change issues growing more and more in urgency, leaders must act in an ethical, strategic and innovative manner to guarantee organizational sustainability and resilience in the future. An organization's leaders need to ensure that the interests of the environment are not lost in pursuit of economic objectives, but are valued equally and measured in terms of long-term sustainability that will create value for the organization and society.

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