

Healthcare Employees' Pro-Environmental Behavior for De-Carbonization

Subjects: [Environmental Studies](#) | [Others](#)

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Buildings worldwide use a large amount of energy and, hence, contribute to increasing the level of greenhouse gases emission (GHG). It was realized that most electrical energy is used in buildings for heating, cooling, and ventilation purposes.

sustainability

carbon neutrality

1. Introduction

Climate change leads to severe and irreversible damage to nature and a community, implying that the sustainability of the environment is a matter of concern for all societies and economies throughout the globe. Realizing that environmental sustainability is one of the major challenges in modern society, environmental scientists have emphasized the urgency of taking action at all levels and called for a significant reduction in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions ^[1]. Indeed, consumption at the level of individuals contributes significantly to the amount of greenhouse gases emission (GHGs). According to a research study, about 60% of the world's GHGs emission is associated with consumption at the individual level ^[2]. In this regard, the latest United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) report posits that the sustainable consumption behavior of individuals can mitigate the climate change issue significantly ^[3].

The above discussion provides ample evidence that manmade problems are directly related to the recent world's environmental issues. Climate data indicates that global warming is shortening the transition times for low-carbon communities and the need for more environmental initiatives ^[4]. Moving to a production system based on renewable and clean resources is essential to mitigate climate change and represents a key element of global environmental policies. Additionally, the pollution and depletion of natural resources are of paramount importance in achieving a sustainable future. To this end, the negative externalities caused by businesses are not the only cause of an environmental hazard, because inadequate attitudes and behaviors of individuals toward the environment in their daily lives also have negative effects. In one case, it was estimated that 16% of the European Union's emissions are due to energy consumption at the level of individuals ^[5]. Specifically, it was mentioned that the energy sector is the critical enabler to raise the level of GHGs globally. More specifically, a UN report showed that the energy sector accounts for nearly 35% of global GHGs. In this vein, global energy consumption at the level of individuals is approximately 30%, accounting for 21% of the total CO₂ emissions. Despite the fact that environmental scientists around the world have been increasingly highlighting the critical contribution of individuals' unsustainable behaviors in increasing the environmental issues ^{[6][7]}, it seems that a consensus has not yet been reached to decide what the factors are that guide pro-environmental behaviors (a kind of eco-friendly behavior) at the level of individuals.

Characterized by an accelerated rate of environmental deterioration due to intense industrialization, businesses are blamed for giving rise to environmental hazards. Massive industrial practices lead businesses to intense uses of natural resources. Therefore, businesses in almost every economy and sector now face continuous pressure from diverse stakeholders to mitigate their environmental footprint ^[8]. There is no denial in accepting the fact that industries in many economies, especially in developed economies, have taken different organizational measures toward carbon neutrality. Nevertheless, despite the importance of negative externalities of businesses from an environmental perspective, it is also important to promote the PEB of employees in an organization. Since negative externalities of businesses due to their industrial practices are not the only cause of the current environmental pandemic, it is worthwhile to promote PEB among employees. Compared to a household's sustainable behavior ^{[9][10][11]}, research under the stream of PEB at the level of employees is still underexplored. Similarly, another knowledge gap that can be revealed by exploring the relevant literature is that a growing body of knowledge in the environmental domain has investigated PEB outcomes. The recent studies of Nisar et al. ^[12] and Ahmad et al. ^[7] are some relevant examples. From a competition and performance perspective, researchers think these studies were logical. However, researchers also feel it is worthwhile to investigate what drives PEB at the level of employees in an organizational context.

The literature informs researchers that employee behavior is formed by different organizational and personal factors ^{[13][14][15][16]}. Research also shows that employees' perceptions regarding the corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities of an organization can influence the PEB of employees ^{[17][18]}. Similarly, the mediating role of green organizational practices was also recently discussed to spur PEB at the level of employees ^[19]. Likewise, the role of personal factors like the altruistic values of individuals (caring for others) was also found influential in driving employees' PEB ^{[20][21]}. However, such studies are sparse, implying that there is a need to conduct more research in this area. Moreover, the mediating role of green

organizational practices and the moderating role of altruistic values in a CSR-PEB framework have not been discussed previously, especially in a developing economy context. Therefore, it will be worthwhile to investigate such relationships to advance the debate on PEB and understand how PEB at the level of employees can help an organization for decarbonization by adopting energy preservation practices.

Healthcare staff, whether private or public, use massive natural resources, especially electricity (air conditioners, heating devices, other electric equipment, etc.), while delivering healthcare to their patients [22]—for example, leaving different electrical devices (surgical, heating and cooling, etc.) switched on while they were not in use. It is estimated that, if not managed efficiently, emissions from air conditioning will increase to almost 90% in 2050 compared to 2017 [23]. Although different developed countries, especially the regions of the EU, have improved their efforts towards decarbonization, the sustainability initiatives in most developing countries of the world are still way behind. Being included in the list of developing countries, Pakistan has been facing vulnerable climatic conditions in recent years [24]. To make matters worse, the environmental quality in the country declines with every passing year [25]. Different cities of Pakistan have been reported several times for their poor air quality index. The country needs emergency measures in all sectors to improve its environmental footprint, with no exception for the healthcare sector, which contributes to an increasing level of GHG emissions through different practices, especially by consuming a large amount of electrical energy. Hence, carrying out this research in a healthcare context will be helpful for this sector to provide fresh insight on how to reduce its environmental footprint by promoting PEB among employees as an outcome of CSR.

2. Healthcare Employees' Pro-Environmental Behavior for De-Carbonization

In order to formulate different hypotheses for this work, researchers underpinned a theoretical grounding in social learning theory (SLT). This theory was introduced by Bandura and McClelland [26], who posited that a person's social behavior is largely based on observing the behaviors of others. In an organizational context, employees observe the behaviors of others (peers, leaders, and the organization itself) and then imitate those behaviors by practicing them. Different behavioral researchers have long-employed the SLT to explain different individual behaviors in an organizational setting [17][27][28].

Specifically, it was stated that the social behavior of an organization that the workers observe in the form of different CSR activities could drive responsible behavior [29][30]. More specifically, an organization's CSR engagement conveys to the workforce that the organization is committed to reducing its environmental footprint under the umbrella of CSR [31]. This social orientation of a socially responsible organization is not only well-observed by the workers, but they also tend to implicate such behaviors on their part. This process thus motivates them to be engaged in PEB by avoiding such actions that negatively impact the environment, for example, reconsidering their approach towards energy consumption. Along with the CSR philosophy of a socially responsible organization, green organizational practices also guide the eco-friendly behavior of employees. In this vein, employees observe that their organization adopts different technologies that help decarbonization, such as using renewable energy or equipment that uses less electricity. The observation of such energy-efficient behavior of an organization ultimately urges the employees to learn the same. Hence, in response to the greening initiatives of an organization (especially toward energy consumption), employees become responsible and support their organization by minimizing their energy consumption level. In light of the above discussion, researchers feel that SLT can logically explain PEB at the level of employees as an outcome of CSR and green practices.

The literature discusses the positive influence of the CSR initiatives of an organization on employees' behaviors [27][32][33]. Even a positive relationship between the CSR engagement of a socially responsible organization and employees' PEB was established at different levels [6][17][18]. Indeed, it was noted that employees positively evaluate the CSR activities of an organization. Further, the social activities under the umbrella of CSR are observed by employees as social benefits for all stakeholders, including consumers, employees, the community, and the environment. In other words, when employees observe that their organization is not self-centered and is concerned for the greater benefit of society and the environment, they learn this social behavior as well. Specifically, in the context of sustainability and environmental management, a socially responsible organization shows extra commitment not only to preserve natural resources but to conserve such resources by using them efficiently [34]. Employees not only observe such resource preservation and conservation behaviors of their employer, but they also imitate these behaviors through the process of social learning, which is at the heart of SLT [28][35].

Further, following the crux of SLT, employees also become the agents of a socially responsible organization to support its sustainability objectives for a better and more sustainable future. In this vein, they partake in different eco-friendly behaviors. Furthermore, observing the resource conservation approach of their socially responsible employer, following the social learning process, employees apply the same approach to themselves. Thus, they also emphasize such practices that guide them to act in ways that produce minimum harm to the environment. For instance, they use less electricity (not turning on the air conditioners or electric lights unnecessarily, using stairs rather than electric escalators, etc.) and use public transport to reach the workplace instead of using their own vehicle [36]. All such activities are associated with their PEB [32][37]. The recent

study of Si et al. [38] also mentioned the importance of an individual's mask-saving intentions in the post-COVID-19 era from a perspective of sustainability. The above discussion can be summarized by stating a positive link between CSR and employees' PEB.

It has been mentioned in the literature that, in response to increasing pressure from various stakeholders, organizations in the current era have adopted different green practices to decarbonize their environmental footprint [39][40]. Industries in the current age, irrelevant in size and sector, including healthcare, implement different green strategies under a CSR framework to achieve corporate sustainability [41][42]. Extending this debate, Lagoudis and Shakri [43] showed the importance of green initiatives in neutralizing carbon emissions. The work of Yu et al. [44] also discussed the importance of green practices of an organization as an outcome of CSR. They mentioned green purchasing and recycling initiatives as green practices of an organization from a CSR perspective. Hens et al. [45] emphasized the need for a greener organizational environment to deal with the environmental issues through inside and outside CSR plans. In the context of the IT industry, Bohas and Poussing [46] argued that an organization's discretionary CSR activities thrive on its potential to adopt green practices.

Despite the fact that a direct link between CSR and green organizational practices has remained a topic of discussion previously, recently, the mediating role of green organizational practices to spur PEB at the level of employees in a CSR framework was also discussed [19]. Afsar et al. [47] posited that enterprises need to integrate CSR activities into sustainable corporate strategies to influence the eco-friendly behavior of their employees. Employees positively evaluate the CSR activities of their organization [48][49], especially when they observe that their organization aligns its CSR activities with sustainability by adopting different green practices, the social learning process helps them to learn such behaviors. Ultimately, employees are self-convinced to respond positively to their socially responsible organization and provide their needed support to the organization for achieving its sustainability objectives. Thus, they become morally responsible by showing a better and more sustainable behavior to align themselves with the sustainability initiatives of an organization. Therefore, CSR activities not only influence the employees' PEB directly, but the presence of green organizational practices provides a further explanation for this relationship.

The role of personal values to influence the behavior of individuals is well-established in the literature at many levels [50][51]. For example, the literature mentioned that the individual values for collectivism could drive entrepreneurial behavioral intentions at the level of an individual [52]. The work of Frank et al. [53] posited that personal values could significantly influence the repurchase behavioral intentions of an individual. The study of Barbarossa et al. [54] highlighted the role of personal environmental values to adopt low-energy consumption technology equipment like electronic vehicles. From the perspective of employees in an organizational setting, it was noted that the environmental values of an employee motivate them to act pro-environmentally [55]. A similar case was reported by Sabokro et al. [56], who mentioned that employees' personal values for greening were positively related to employees' green behaviors. Although the seminal role of altruistic values to form sustainable behavior in individuals was discussed many years ago [57], nevertheless, the current environmental crisis throughout the globe urges scholars to investigate the role of altruistic values more explicitly for eco-friendly behavior formation at the level of individuals. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that a surge in the literature on environmental management from a value perspective (especially altruistic values) has been seen [58][59][60].

Although values provide a foundation for behavior formation, nevertheless, values only provide a general basis to guide one's behavior in a specific context. This indicates that, instead of examining the direct role of personal values on individual behavior, it is more important to test the moderating effect of such values in a specific framework. Buttressing this, Al-Ghazali and Afsar [61] discussed the conditional indirect role of employees' green values to spur employee green creativity in a green human resource framework. Similarly, the moderating role of personal values to guide the purchase behavior of individuals for low-carbon emission cars was also discussed recently [54]. In the same vein, the conditional indirect role of employees' green values in a transformational leadership framework was tested by Zhou et al. [62]. They reported a positive conditional indirect effect of green values between the mediated relationship of transformational leadership and green product development performance. From the perspective of CSR and PEB of employees, the recent work of Shao et al. [20] highlighted the important role of altruistic values to spur employees' PEB. To summarize the above debate, it can be stated that there is a clear role of individual values to form a behavior. However, the general nature of values requires a specific context to guide the behaviors of individuals in a specific direction. In this aspect, altruistic values stress the well-being of others, which is also the subject of a socially responsible organization that takes different measures through its green practices for a sustainable future. When combined, CSR and green organizational practices are generally believed to enhance PEB at the level of employees. However, employees' altruistic values provide further strength to this relationship.

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