16

LEADING PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

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CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Introduction
- The nature of environmental sustainability
- Employees' pro-environmental behaviours and environmental management systems
- Environmental leadership, organizational change and culture
- Creating a sustainable workplace through human resource practices
- Employee voice in environmental sustainability
- Critical perspectives on corporate-oriented sustainability
- Conclusion

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- explain the nature of environmental sustainability and the role of the workplace both as a significant contributor to carbon emissions and as a site for implementing environmental improvements;
- explain the role of organizational leadership in influencing environmental sustainability;
- critically analyse pro-environment management strategies;
- explain how learning and development are connected to change management strategies;
- explain the meaning of 'employee voice' and how it contributes to environmental sustainability in the workplace.

VIDEO

▶ To learn more about the growing importance of sustainability within organizations, don't forget to **watch the video conversation** for this chapter online.

INTRODUCTION

The 2018 UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that the Earth is on track to overshoot the targets of the Paris climate agreement and warm by 3 degrees C by the end of the century, a level that would 'disrupt life on the planet and cause long-lasting or irreversible changes' (Hook, 2018: 4). This would result not so much in climate change but ever more catastrophically uncontrollable 'runaway climate change' (Barkham, 2018). It is within this context that there has been more incentive for organizations to report on their environmental sustainability activities. This includes an area of management we have examined in previous chapters: human resource management (HRM). In this chapter, we extend the discussion to 'sustainable' or 'green' HRM. Here, environmental sustainability incorporates ecological or environmental considerations (e.g. carbon emissions) with organizational needs (e.g. profitability) in such a way as to promote benefits for the environment (Norton et al., 2015). That work organizations are both part of the problem as well as part of the solution to carbon accumulation is not in doubt. The question examined in this chapter, however, is to what extent do organizational environmental leadership and people-oriented management practices contribute to changing behaviours that can create more environmentally sustainable workplaces?

The aim of this chapter is to examine how environmental leadership and HR practices influence environmental sustainability in the workplace. It introduces the concept of environmental sustainability and examines how this might be integrated within a workplace context to create positive outcomes for employees, their organization as well as the environment. It begins with explaining the nature of environmental sustainability and why, and how, it is closely connected to organizational change. This is followed by a discussion of the role of environmental leadership and HR practices in reducing carbon emissions. Finally, it focuses on organizational change strategies to support environmental sustainability in the workplace.

💡   **PAUSE AND REFLECT**

What do you understand by the term 'sustainability' as it relates to the planet?

THE NATURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability discourse evolved in the 1970s and 1980s with publications on the ecological limits of economic growth (e.g. Meadows et al., 1972). The issue of sustainability was initially debated at the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm (Sumner, 2005: 79). A significant development came with the formation of the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED; also known as the Bruntland Commission), which subsequently provided the now classical definition of *sustainable development*: 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (1987: 43).

Conceptually, the meaning of sustainability, as cited in the Brundtland Commission, 'can be understood as an overarching worldview recognizing the interconnectedness of ecological, social, and economic factors in human activity' (Docherty et al., 2009: 6). The Commission's report also introduced 'the concept of justice (within and between generations, global justice and justice through participation and democratic arrangements) as a central issue in relation to efforts to enhance sustainability' (Lund, 2004: 43).

Sustainability science is an interdisciplinary field that seeks to enhance sustainability by integrating knowledge from a range of disciplines including natural sciences, engineering, social sciences and the humanities (Kates et al., 2001). The challenge for sustainability science is to ensure that knowledge production is a communal effort that links academic research with industry and government, and benefits individuals and society (Wiek et al., 2011). Sustainability science is embedded within broader social processes of understanding, and thus contributes to organizational decision-making processes through the creation of knowledge (particularly analysis of risks and consequences) derived from emergent interdisciplinary enquiry (Kasemir et al., 2003). Although it is recognized that there is a multiplicity of viewpoints, sustainability is, for an increasing number of organizational and environmental writers, the ultimate goal: that is, 'living within the regenerative capacity of the biosphere' (Wackernagel et al., 2002: 9266). Importantly, in terms of managing work and people, scholars of sustainability science advocate participatory and collaborative approaches to the co-generation of knowledge and environmental decision making (Blackstock et al., 2007).

Environmental management is an attempt to control the human impact on and interaction with the natural environment in order to preserve natural resources. At the organizational level, *corporate environmental performance* refers to 'organizational performance in managing natural resources and the natural environment in the process of conducting business' (Ones and Dilchert, 2012: 450). Corporate environmental performance includes both environmental outcomes and the pro-environmental initiatives that organizations implement. The former represent the ecological impact or 'footprint' of organizational

activities; the latter focus on what organizations do for environmental sustainability. In the workplace, this includes encouraging energy efficiency, waste reduction and recycling, water conservation and employees' use of alternative low-carbon forms of transportation (e.g. a bus, train or bicycle). At the individual level, workplace pro-environmental behaviour (WPEB) can be defined as 'a systematic set of actions from a collective network of organizational actors spread across a company, team, and/or value chain' (Kennedy et al., 2015: 370). For employees, this entails changes to their existing job duties, additional requirements of their position and, in some cases, the creation of entirely new occupational opportunities, such as 'environmental manager' (Ones and Dilchert, 2012).

Although environmental sustainability has been debated for decades, it is an emerging concept in the business world, and the existing literature provides numerous and varied interpretations of it. In contemporary management parlance, sustainability has been used to refer to values and ethics, as well as goals such as corporate social responsibility (CSR). In 1997, expert John Elkington, for example, coined the term 'triple bottom line' or 'P3' (People, Planet and Profit) which emphasizes that, in sustainable workplaces, human and social resources along with ecological and economic resources should be able to grow and develop. From a work systems perspective, sustainability has been described as an ongoing process of efficiency and improved environmental and social performance (Docherty et al., 2009). For Norton and his colleagues (2015), organizational efficiency and improvements to the planet are combined in the concept of *environmental sustainability*. In the organizational context, this means that environmental sustainability incorporates business needs (e.g. profitability) with environmental consideration (e.g. lower carbon emissions) in such a way as to be ecologically beneficial to the planet.

Therefore, WPEBs are necessary but not sufficient for environmental (corporate) sustainability. Popular corporate strategy authors have been optimistic, arguing that although the concept is understood to mean different things to different people, it has nevertheless made a positive social and environmental impact. For example, management strategy expert Michael Porter, championing the concept of creating competitive advantage and shared value, has argued that the ongoing efforts of certain corporations are helping to transform sustainability from a 'cliché term' to an innovative and enduring business strategy (Porter and Kramer, 2006, 2011).

PAUSE AND REFLECT

In addition to the business case, to what extent have public protests and the environmental movement transformed sustainability into a potential innovative business strategy?

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION: TRUST AS THE MOST VALUABLE COMMODITY IN BUSINESS?

It has been argued that *trust* – the invisible glue that holds communities and social contacts in place – is the most valuable commodity in business (Corner, 2015) and the workplace. You may recall from Chapter 5 the Volkswagen emissions scandal that helped reinforce public cynicism about the ability of the private sector to act in good faith to help combat climate change. In Wolfsburg, Germany, the headquarters of Volkswagen, when news of the scandal broke thousands of VW employees, their families and their community were angry and fearful (Goffee and Jones, 2015). They were angry that an incredibly successful and profitable company, in which many had invested their entire working lives, could have engaged in large-scale corporate deception. An article in the *New York Times* explains that

> The most significant difference between the European and American approaches to emissions standards is that regulators in the United States conduct their own tests to check whether manufacturers' claims are accurate. In contrast in Europe, testing is left to the discretion of automakers and their contractors. (Hakim and Barthelemy, 2015: B1)

With just 100 companies responsible for 71 per cent of the global emissions, companies have a huge role to play in contributing to climate change (Riley, 2017). In the context of the VW emissions scandal, why should individuals bother to take the issue seriously either? And if corporations can't be trusted, should governments intervene with stricter emissions regulations?

Reflective question

Do you agree or disagree that trust is the most valuable commodity in business and the workplace? How important is mutual trust between leaders and other employees?

Sources

Hakim, D. and Barthelemy, C. (2015) 'VW fought in Europe on testing', *New York Times*, 2 December, p. B1.

Riley, T. (2017) 'Just 100 companies responsible for 17 per cent of global emissions, study says', *Guardian*, 10 July.

To explore this topic further see:

Goffee, R. and Jones, G. (2015) *Why Should Anyone Work Here? What it takes to create an authentic organization.* Brighton, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

The burgeoning literature demonstrates that sustainability is no longer a fringe issue. Corporate titans, for example retailer Walmart (2018), Google (2018) and BP (2017), have embraced elements of sustainability. In the 20th century, occupational health and safety was always an issue for trade unions, but in the 21st century,

institutions such as the International Labour Organization, the European Trade Union Confederation and the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) in the UK have also embraced the wider concept of sustainability. Sustainability is particularly relevant to 'mission-driven organizations, such as governments, charities, and universities, because they are not evaluated in traditional financial terms, and have missions that go beyond the bottom line' (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005: 130). This trend towards sustainability, no doubt influenced by the environmental movement of the 1980s and the CSR movement of the 1990s, has influenced organizational leaders to become increasingly aware of the need to build positive relations with stakeholders, both internal and external to the organization (Harrison and Freeman, 1999).

The concept of sustainability has evolved since its first usage over 30 years ago. There is a general consensus in the literature that the concept of sustainability is linked to nature, the notion of resource conservation, and, as outlined by Dyllick and Hockerts (2002), present-day interpretations of the term have been influenced primarily by three different stakeholder groups: ecologists, business strategy scholars and the United Nations (WCED, 1987). While its origin begins with the natural environment, the concept often embodies a human emphasis, 'reflecting not only a concern for our future, but also an unease with our current situation and an emphasis on human agency' (Sumner, 2005: 78). Instead of helping to improve our understanding of sustainability, these contradictory interpretations and their tensions indicate the kind of problem that sustainability can pose, both in evaluating the literature and in terms of employers and employees working in partnership towards more sustainable outcomes in the workplace. Following the perspective throughout this textbook, sustainability is examined here through a prism that recognizes that the employment relationship is, by necessity, cooperative but that it also entails unavoidable structural conflict between managers and workers.

EMPLOYEES' PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOURS AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

The extant literature on sustainable workplaces raises the possibility that work organizations, through appropriate policies, processes and practices, can make strategic choices that may enhance natural resource efficiency and reduce the amount of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere (Cox et al., 2012). It is in the workplace, therefore, where human resources (HR) policies and practices have their effects on the issue of work itself and, by extension, on employee behaviour, labour productivity and environmental sustainability (Bratton, 2020). It is to the workplace that one must look to examine how managers' and workers' behaviours and own goals combine to create more environmentally sustainable workplaces. The workplace is a site where social relationships shape interests, motives and the actions of managers and workers, and where cooperation and resistance around management objectives take place in a 'contested terrain' (Edwards, 1979).

Workplace sustainability is therefore more than a technical challenge – it goes to the very heart of managing people.

Ultimately, the solution to reducing carbon emissions in the workplace lies with those social sciences that are tasked with changing employee behaviour. In this regard, Boiral et al. (2015) provide some insight into the nature and scope of employees' pro-environmental behaviours, and Renwick et al. (2016) examine the role of green HRM (GHRM), which we will go on to consider in the next section.

Employees' pro-environmental behaviours

The role of employees' pro-environmental behaviours has been highlighted in many environmental studies (e.g. Yuriev et al., 2018). Pro-environmental behaviour is a multifaceted concept used to describe a broad range of actions intended to benefit the natural environment. Ones and Dilchert (2012: 452) define *employees' pro-environmental behaviours* as 'scalable actions and behaviours that employees engage in that are linked with and contribute to or detract from environmental sustainability'. This definition focuses on environmental behaviours inside organizations at the individual level, and excludes those behaviours rooted in employees' own lifestyle. Notwithstanding the value of the definition, Ones and Dilchert focus only on measurable behaviour at the employee level and exclude actions taken by employees to support organizational practices, or informal initiatives. Therefore, a more inclusive definition of WPEB includes 'all types of voluntary or prescribed activity undertaken by individuals at work that aim to protect the natural environment or improve organizational practices in this area' (Boiral et al., 2015: 21). This definition highlights the diverse nature of *informal* and *formal* employee-level behaviour and organizational initiatives, and the *voluntary* or *prescribed* nature of the pro-environmental behaviours of employees and managers alike. Employee pro-environmental behaviours mostly comprise task performance or organizational citizenship (commitment and engagement) behaviours. Empirical research in this area has demonstrated that effective environmental sustainability change depends, to a large extent, on various behaviours intended to reduce pollution, internalize environmental management practices and contribute to eco-innovations (Boiral et al., 2015).

Environmental management systems

Within the emergent sustainable workplace literature, it has been argued that in order to work towards the goal of environmental sustainability, organizational managers must develop an environmental management system (EMS). An EMS is the most widely recognized tool for managing the impacts of an organization's activities on the environment. It refers to the management of an organization's environmental impact in a comprehensive, systematic, planned and documented manner. It incorporates people, procedures and working practices into a formal

structure, involves all members of an organization as appropriate, promotes continual improvement, including periodically evaluating environmental performance, and actively engages senior management in support of the EMS (see e.g. Zutshi and Sohal, 2004). EMS enables organizations to achieve more environmentally sustainable processes, practices and outcomes (see e.g. Jabbour et al., 2010). Thus, the focus is on improving environmental performance and maintaining compliance with environmental regulations. As EMS and risk management are analogous activities, EMS supports an organization's overall approach to environmental risk management.

ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP, ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AND CULTURE

A growing body of research has highlighted the importance of leadership (Robertson and Barling, 2015) and organizational culture (Norton et al., 2015) to drive both organizational and employee-level pro-environmental performance. The focus in this chapter is on how leaders affect their organization's environmental performance through influencing the behaviour of individual employees and by changing organizational practices and culture.

Image 16.1 Environmental leadership is a process to create a shared vision of environmental sustainability and motivate others to create sustainable organizations in an equitable manner whilst living within the limits of ecosystems.

Environmental leadership

Although employees' pro-environmental behaviours are critical to the effectiveness of environmental sustainability initiatives, there is insufficient understanding of the role of leadership to support these behaviours (Afsar et al., 2018). Within the strategic management context, the goal of environmental leadership is to motivate followers to achieve high levels of environmental performance. Egri and Herman (2000: 572) define environmental leadership as 'the ability to influence individuals and mobilize organizations to realize a vision of long-term ecological sustainability.' This definition is based on the notion that, guided by eco-centric values and assumptions, environmental leaders seek to change economic and social systems that they perceive as being currently and potentially threatening to the health of the biophysical environment. Robertson and Barling's (2015: 166) framework for pro-environmental leadership highlights the importance of leaders, inspired by their own personal values, attitudes and perceptions, striving 'to influence others at all levels of the organization in an effort to benefit the natural environment'. Pro-environmental leaders typically demonstrate transformational patterns of behaviour, including charisma, two-way communication, collaboration, and an orientation towards changing work systems, that reduce the environmental impact of an organization. For example, Portugal and Yukl (1994: 274) report transformational leadership behaviours such as 'articulating an appealing vision with environmental issues, changing perceptions about environmental issues, and taking symbolic actions to demonstrate personal commitment to environmental issues.' Importantly, leaders' supportive behaviours have been shown to be a crucial component of environmental leadership (Robertson and Barling, 2015). Here environmental leadership is defined as a process to create a shared vision of environmental sustainability and motivate others to create sustainable organizations in an equitable manner whilst living within the limits of ecosystems. This definition emphasizes the importance of vision to help align individuals and motivate followers, that the coordinated pro-environmental initiatives must be sustainable and viable for the organization, and, at the same time, marries pro-environmental leadership with notions of social justice and ecological limits.

A *sustainability leader* can extend beyond senior managers (Ferdig, 2007). Robertson and Barling (2015: 169) found that pro-environmental leaders are more likely to: (1) possess personal values that go beyond self-interest; (2) have favourable attitudes toward the natural environment; (3) perceive social pressure to support environmental and sustainability initiatives; and (4) view environmental issues as commercial opportunities for their organization. Other studies have identified different types of behaviours enacted by sustainability leaders, including line-management supportive behaviours (Ramus, 2001). These behaviours include encouraging innovation among employees, competence-building, communicating ideas on sustainability, dissemination of information, rewards and recognition, and management of goals and responsibilities by disseminating environmental targets and responsibilities. Kotter (2012) points to the importance

of leadership behaviours that encourage employee involvement and participation in organizational change. Participation at all levels of management is essential to the introduction of environmental sustainability change (Davis and Coan, 2015). However, internal workplace stakeholders – specifically front-line managers – are seen to be critical to the overall success of an organization's sustainability strategy (Bratton and Bratton, 2015).

Reframing organizational culture

Having explored the concept of organizational culture in Chapter 4, here we ask 'What role does culture play in developing employees' pro-environmental behaviours?'. Findings across several studies consistently show that, when implementing strategic change, managers need to consider organizational culture and climate (see Chapter 4). Norton et al. (2015) define a pro-environmental organizational culture as

> a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it adapts to the challenges posed by human activity's impact on the natural environment in a way that permits day-to-day functioning, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to environmental sustainability' (Norton et al., 2015: 329–30)

At the individual level, a pro-environmental climate – defined as employees' shared perceptions of pro-environmental policies and practices that management tangibly supports – acts as a go-between between the perception of management's pro-environmental behaviour and the pro-environmental behaviour of employees. Research suggests that leaders and organizational culture and climate influence employees' and their organizations' environmental performance. There is debate regarding whether organizations need to have an underlying 'moral commitment to sustainability' (Davis and Coan, 2015: 247), which suggests that there is a need for the principles, assumptions and values that underpin the organization's norms and rules to be changed if sustainability is to be achieved (see e.g. Hayes, 2014). This introduces the concept of 'cultural congruence'; that is, for an organization to become environmentally sustainable, its underlying values and assumptions must be aligned with sustainability interventions in such a way that employees' attitudes and behaviours support the organization's overall low-carbon strategic objectives (Russell and McIntosh, 2011). A sustainable workplace is therefore associated with specific pro-environmental attitudes, values and behaviours. Taken together, the available research findings identify two key antecedents or enablers of pro-environmental behaviours and initiatives, which are leadership and a pro-environmental culture and climate.

In this context, organizational behaviour theorists have tried to identify effective ways to change manifestations of organizational culture: visible artefacts,

including language and shared behaviour; work values, which are invisible, but can be espoused; and various sets of HRM practices that reinforce culture. Research shows that the three main strategies of planned culture change are:

- Leadership processes that create the motivation to change behaviour, with a particular emphasis on their symbolic content; for example, replacing office plastic cups with ceramic.
- Reframing social networks of symbols and meanings through artefacts, language, rituals and ceremonies; for example, a 'best employee' award for an initiative that helps to decarbonize the organization.
- Initiating new HRM practices to change work conduct; for example, training new and existing employees about the need and benefits of reducing carbon emissions in the workplace.

A process model of strategic change

All three strategies implicitly adhere to Lewin's (1951) three-stage model of planned change, which involves 'unfreezing' present inappropriate employee work conduct, 'changing' to new behaviour patterns, and positive reinforcement to 'refreeze' the desired change. Drawing upon leadership studies, the three strategies of planned culture change are shown in Figure 16.1. Steps 1 and 2 represent Lewin's 'unfreezing' stage, steps 3 and 4 represent the 'changing' stage, and step 5 represents the 'refreezing' or consolidation process. John Kotter's 8-step model (2012), which subsumes Lewin's model, attempts to change culture through an empiricist-rational strategy. That is, individuals make rational choices if provided with 'correct' information. Steps 1 to 4 in Kotter's model represent Lewin's 'unfreezing' stage. Steps 5, 6 and 7 represent the 'changing' stage, and step 8 represents the 'refreezing' process. The approach emphasizes the importance of communicating a clear change vision to all stakeholders affected so that employees can participate in the change initiative. Senge et al.'s (1999) systematic model highlights the critical period after change implementation, the role of leaders in removing perceived barriers to change, and the importance of sustaining cultural change.

Harris and Crane (2002) identify an undeveloped conception of organizational culture in the GHRM literature, with non-functionalist views of culture largely being ignored. The comparative case study research by Fineman (1996, 1997) has been referred to as 'something of an antidote to the non-empirical and largely uncritical literature on green organizational culture' (Harris and Crane, 2002: 217). It suggests that even in the 'most progressive firms', environmental values and beliefs tend to be absorbed into existing cultural assumptions and beliefs rather than eliciting any kind of cultural transformation. Newton and Harte (1997) expose the over-reliance on simplistic formulae for green change, the overselling of voluntary change as a solution to environmental issues, and the lack of a critical perspective on how and why culture change might occur. A simplistic formula, for example, would be to believe that the organization can impact climate change just

by replacing single-use plastic cups, that individual effort rather than enforceable carbon-reducing legislation is a solution to high-carbon workplaces, and neglecting the role of values in nudging human behaviour towards more pro-environmental action.


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│        1. Establish a sense of urgency         │
│     Identify and discuss realities and why cultural │
│                 change is needed.              │
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│         2. Develop vision and strategy         │
│      Create a vision and strategic plan for change. │
│             Communicate the change vision.      │
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│     3. Reframe social networks and meanings    │
│        Build high levels of affective commitment │
│                 and shared values.             │
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│      4. Create a coalition and empower action  │
│        Create cross-functional groups with power to │
│      lead and eliminate obstacles to cultural change. │
│                 Consolidate 'gains'.           │
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│           5. Develop new HR practices          │
│      Practices connect to and reinforce shared values, │
│        new behaviours and organizational routines.  │
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        │     Change of organizational culture     │
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Figure 16.1   A strategy for creating a sustainable workplace (adapted from Bratton and Gold, 2012: 163)

PAUSE AND REFLECT

Thinking of your university, do you feel that top leadership value sustainability? Have the university's leaders communicated a shared 'green' vision? If so, how?

The extant literature on organizational culture and business strategy highlights how important it is that the prevailing business strategy and organizational culture are consistent with each other (internal fit) and with the wider operation of the organization (external fit) (e.g. Chow and Liu, 2009). For example, a company may be targeting sales of a new craft beer to the 19- to 24-year-old

age group but its processing system uses traditional methods, which is energy inefficient and pollutes a nearby river. Extending the best-fit debate, theory and empirical research suggest that a green HR strategy should coincide with the organization's business strategy and create an appropriate culture in which to enhance environmental performance. Broadly, the HRM approach to building a low-carbon workplace is to develop and support the workplace's environmental sustainability initiatives.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

Visit the website of the Canadian company Steam Whistle Brewing at www.steamwhistle.ca (accessed 6 October 2019). To what extent does the company's organizational culture fit its business model?

CREATING A SUSTAINABLE WORKPLACE THROUGH HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES

What role do HRM practices play in developing employees' pro-environmental behaviours? As previous chapters suggest, when HR policies and practices are embedded into the organization's architecture they improve organizational outcomes. Serial research suggests that when green HR practices are embedded, they also improve environmental sustainability (Fernández et al., 2003). The established use of HR processes in occupational health and safety, minimum waste production as part of a 'lean' manufacturing system and cultural management make HRM well positioned to coordinate the goals of a sustainable workplace (Oliveira and Pinheiro, 2009).

An early contribution to the debate on the links between HRM and environmental management was made by Wehrmeyer's (1996) edited book, *Greening People: Human Resources and Environmental Management*. In it, HRM is associated with a distinctive HR philosophy, strategy and set of determinate HR practices (see Chapter 9) to create a *high-performance work system* (HPWS). Building on the HPWS concept, Bratton and Bratton define a low-carbon work system as:

> A planned approach to organization design, culture, and HR practices to deliver low-carbon outcomes in the workplace as well as to align the organization and its processes to achieve innovation and sustainable high-quality results for the organization, workforce, and customers. (2015: 277)

A *low-carbon work system* (LCWS) requires new roles and low-carbon behavioural activities for leaders, managers and other employees. Low-carbon behaviours occur at three levels: individual, social and material (Cox et al., 2012):

- *Individual-level influences* act on individual motivations (e.g. personal rewards).
- *Social-level influences* act on employees when operating in teams or groups (e.g. social norms, shared understandings and communities of practice).
- *Material-level influences* act on organizational structure and processes (e.g. products, technology and environment).

The research by Cox et al. (2012) suggests that behavioural interventions tend to be most successful when they consider these three dimensions holistically, and do not simply focus on trying to change individual employee attitudes or just installing new technology. In other words, when establishing a LCWS, the goal should be to take an integrated approach that raises awareness and improves understanding with individual employees and groups, builds social meaning and norms around pro-environmental, 'low-carbon' or 'sustainable' working practices, and supports employees with the technology they need, backed up with consistent policies.

HRM scholars have tried to identify effective ways to change manifestations of an environmentally sustainable organizational culture through modified HR practices. The emergent literature on GHRM emphasizes that a set of integrated HR practices covering recruitment, selection, performance management, training and development, rewards and employment relations can promote pro-environmental behaviours at work and build a more environmentally sustainable organizational culture.

Existing GHRM studies highlight the opportunity for improved environmental performance when the goals, policies and procedures of EMSs are more closely aligned or 'embedded' (Purcell and Kinnie, 2007) with HR practices and wider activities of the organization (see e.g. Chen, 2011; Jørgensen, 2000). However, this convergence between HR practices and organizational culture is considered secondary in classic studies of organizational sustainability (see e.g. Shrivastava, 1995). A central question that arises from the literature is whether effective environmental sustainability initiatives can develop from top-down management-driven exercises, or whether they are more likely to be successful if they are part of a more grass roots, employee-led initiative for environmental sustainability in the workplace. To date, much of the GHRM research has focused on core HR practices (see Chapter 11, Figure 11.2).

Recruitment and selection

Environmental sustainability has become an important dimension shaping the recruitment and selection process. Research suggests that attracting top candidates is easier for organizations known for their superior environmental stewardship (Gully et al., 2013; Rupp et al., 2013). An Italian study found, for example, that 'green recruiting practices' could have a distinct and direct effect on attracting applicants (Guerci et al., 2016). One obvious way to build a sustainable workplace is through self-selection of prospective employees. For example, German companies such as chemical and pharmaceutical company Bayer and engineering company

Siemens use their environmental reputation to attract competent employees who are committed to the environment (Jabbour and Santos, 2008). The published research suggests that given a choice, people are attracted to green employers that are keenly attuned to climate change issues and have a strong ecological approach (Philips, 2007). Environmentally sensitive job previews combined with accurate portrayal of the organization's culture can attract talented people with values that match and promote sustainability (Jabbour, 2011).

Another way to embed ecological values in the workplace is by selecting people with green-related skills and values. The selection process may be designed to ensure that 'employees committed to the environmental issue have a potential to be hired more than those who do not show an ability to lead the environmental management in a company' (Jabbour and Santos, 2008: 53). Studies also suggest that it may be expedient to start hiring managers who have a proven track record of environmental performance and value environmental protection (see e.g. Ramus, 2002). Personality- and competency-based tests provide the tools that enable managers to find talented individuals who seem to fit the new culture. Selection tests based on attitudinal and behavioural profiling can also be used to screen applicants for green values.

Pro-environmental training and learning

Consensus is growing among academics that the issues of sustainability, organizational change and training and learning are closely interrelated. Training and workplace learning is a primary intervention for developing pro-environmental behaviours (Garavan and McGuire, 2010). Much of company training appears to be related to improving employees' health and safety, energy saving and waste management. For example, the US company 3M has encouraged employees to find creative ways to reduce pollution through their Pollution Prevention Pays (3Ps) programme, which has saved the company close to $300 million (Renwick et al., 2008: 7). Training and learning is a necessary component of advanced environmental management systems. The literature suggests that a major factor in a successful EMS is a comprehensive training programme that provides all employees, at all levels of the organization, with the tools and understanding necessary to conduct themselves in an environmentally aware manner, foster innovation, make environmentally responsible decisions and contribute to continued environmental improvements (Daily and Huang, 2001).

Research suggests that the level of employee environmental awareness is one of the most important predictors of the level of adoption and success of an organization's environmental initiatives. Perron et al. (2006: 553) report, for example, that the intent of clause 4.4.2 of ISO 14001 is to 'ensure that employees at all levels of the organization understand the goals of the EMS and the ways their job activities impact the environment and the achievement of EMS goals' (ISO, 2015). This understanding allows employees to participate in environmental management efforts, and could lead to the improved environmental performance of an organization. Zilahy's (2003) study

of the factors restricting the implementation of energy efficiency improvement indicates that perhaps the most salient restrictive factor was the level of employee environmental awareness. Research findings support the importance of employees being well versed in environmental issues, environmental processes and the overall functioning of environmental management systems to ensure that an organization's environmental targets and objectives were achieved (see e.g. Sammalisto and Brorson, 2008).

Rewarding pro-environmental behaviours

The organization's reward system provides a good indication of the seriousness of its commitment to environmental sustainability management (Berrone and Gomez-Mejia, 2009). The rewards can be monetary or non-monetary, and could be tied to individual, group or organizational actions (see Chapter 11). Monetary rewards may be one of the strongest motivators for encouraging employees to participate in environmental improvement activity. For example, aligning compensation practices with environmental strategy has been implemented in North American companies such as Huntsman Corporation (chemicals), Browning-Ferris Industries (waste management) and Coors Brewing Company (Milliman and Clair, 1996), where financial rewards are tied to employees' environmental performance. In this regard, managers will need to determine whether environmental responsibilities and initiatives should be incorporated into managers' and employees' performance appraisal. Denton (1999) observes that, even in some of the best-known companies for encouraging environmental initiatives, financial rewards are rarely tied to environmental performance.

Studies suggest that many workplaces are encouraging environmental activities using non-monetary rewards such as employee recognition schemes, time off from work, gift certificates and paid vacations (Govindarajulu and Daily, 2004). For example, Dow Chemical Company, a leading American multinational corporation, motivates its employees by awarding plaques to employees who develop innovative waste-reduction ideas (Denton, 1999). Some employees may be more motivated by formal or informal recognition than financial incentives. Empirical findings from six environmentally proactive European firms have shown that two of the most important factors for engaging employees and encouraging creative ideas are management support and company environmental awards (Ramus, 2002). This suggests that front-line managers should seek environmental ideas from all employees, and seek opportunities to provide feedback to encourage employees' engagement in environmental sustainability. Whether rewards are monetary or non-monetary in nature, the reward system has to be supported by an effective communication plan (Parker and Wright, 2001), rewards must be tied to the achievement of environmental objectives (Starik and Rands, 1995), and they must be consistent with other aspects of the rewards system (May and Flannery, 1995).

Performance management and appraisal

Emergent studies in environmental management (Garavan and McGuire, 2010) suggest that, in those organizations with proactive environmental sustainability programmes, individual performance appraisal systems (IPAs) can improve the effectiveness of environmental management over time by guiding employees' behaviour and actions toward the environmental performance outcomes desired by the organization (Milliman and Clair, 1996). Jabbour et al. (2010) report that Brazilian manufacturing companies are establishing environmental objectives for their employees, whose performance is evaluated as one of the criteria of the performance appraisal. For example, the business services Xerox Corporation has a reward system that recognizes employees who meet certain levels of innovation in terms of how they deal with waste reduction, reuse and recycling (Milliman and Clair, 1996). Without performance appraisal, pro-environmental behaviours may come to a standstill. Chinander (2001) highlights how many environmental management programmes fail to emphasize the importance of feedback on environmental issues. Continual feedback ensures that employees are aware of their responsibilities and communicates the link between their environmental performance outcomes and rewards (Govindarajulu and Daily, 2004).

EMPLOYEE VOICE IN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Employee voice has been discussed in Chapter 8 covering relational and distributed leadership. In this section, we extend the discussion by critically examining how employee and trade union voice is processed to create a sustainable workplace and improve environmental management (Hampton, 2015; Markey et al., 2019). Recent GHRM studies such as Montabon et al. (2016) have tended to focus on non-union processes, and most only go so far as to suggest that managers should use various employee representation arrangements to encourage employee 'voice' (Brio et al., 2007). As Perron et al. (2006: 556) opine, 'the many small actions and decisions that all members of an organization can make in their everyday work can cumulate to large improvements in the environmental impacts of the organization.' The research suggests that when employees are 'engaged' through employee participation processes, they will better understand how they can contribute toward environmental sustainability. This highlights further that without the ingenuity and expertise of human capital, environmental management initiatives may be limited and superficial.

If pro-environment change is desired, Kelly's (1992) notion of effective followers (see Chapter 13) underscores the value of followers' engagement and agency. Employee voice mechanisms such as 'green teams' (Daily et al., 2007) and 'eco-champions' (Brosse, 2010) are major elements of the GHRM strategy because they provide followers with an opportunity to use their intimate knowledge of work and discretion at work to generate creative, eco-friendly initiatives rather than rely solely on leaders.

Table 16.1   Different concepts of involvement and participation

Elements within management	Employee involvement	Employee participation
Decision-making process	Management initiated and controlled	Dialectics between top- down and bottom-up managerial tasks allocated to workers
Level of competence	Limited to assignments and functions	Involves high-level decisions
Forms of consultation	Individual only	Collective and individual representation
Strategy for innovation/ change	Management through goals and visions	Dialogue and cooperation
Views on the employees' role in workplace changes	Employees as important production factors	Employees as political actors

Source: adapted from Lund, 2004: 53

Lund's classification (Table 16.1) shows different levels of employee participation from the perspective of workplace democracy. The distinction between 'employee involvement' and 'participation' may be conceptualized in terms of six categories: (1) information; (2) practical involvement; (3) consultation; (4) negotiation; (5) codetermination; and (6) self-management (Lund, 2004: 53). These categories only relate to the question of 'how' employees participate, and therefore must also be combined with categories describing the subject of participation. These subject categories can be described in terms of increasing levels of participation in managerial decisions such as: (1) welfare decisions; (2) shop-floor operational decisions; (3) tactical business decisions; and (4) strategic business decisions (Walters and Frick, 2000).

✎ CRITICAL INSIGHT: UNION ACTION TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT?

By responding to what has been described as one of the 'big issues of the day', unions can influence sustainability in the workplace (Hampton, 2015). The challenge facing the trade union movement is that sustainability goals can be in conflict with the perceived interests of different groups of workers within a single union and between unions. In the UK, employees and unions have no legal rights of involvement in workplace environmental issues and, to date, few employers have signed collective 'green' agreements (TUC and Allan, 2008). This situation is likely to remain while there is no legal requirement for mandatory union involvement in environmental issues. Minimal investment in workplace environmental training

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and zero government commitments for statutory environmental representative rights have caused environmentalists and union leaders to lament the lack of cooperation between unions and green advocacy groups and political parties. The responsibility for an absence of 'gains sharing' opportunities does not rest entirely with reluctant employers.

Activity

1. Why should unions participate in environmental sustainability issues in the workplace?
2. What are their interests?
3. What are the potential benefits for employers and employees? What are the challenges?

Further information

Pearce, S. (2012) 'Tackling climate change: a new role for trade unions in the workplace?', Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. Available at www.acas. org.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=3291andp=0 (accessed 7 October 2018) to explore how trade unions can contribute to creating an environmental sustainability workplace.

In the UK, the climate of employment relations has changed radically over the last three decades (Farnham, 2015b: 231). In the post-2008 recession, a key question remains: 'Who gains what from being involved?' Leaders and managers have the power to drive (or not) employee participation (see Chapter 3). It is plausible therefore to assume that leaders and managers expect to see some advantage from investing in time-consuming voice mechanisms, and HR practices which critics might see as 'an expensive waste of time' (Wilkinson et al., 2010: 5).

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CORPORATE-ORIENTED SUSTAINABILITY

Mainstream environmental studies do not tend to engage sufficiently with conflicts inherent in the employment relationship (Lund, 2004: 48–49); they also tend to largely neglect the role of the state (e.g. government legislation) in combating climate change (Betsill and Rabe, 2009). Critical authors three decades ago argued that the term *sustainability* had become a purposeful distraction, 'deliberately vague […] so that endless streams of academics and diplomats could spend many comfortable hours trying to define it without success' (O'Riordan, 1988: 37). Later, others added to this critique, arguing that the sustainability debate had become too 'technocratic, mere rhetoric, in-egalitarian, and for being a *smokescreen for perpetuation of the status quo, vacuous, politically correct sloganeering*' (Buttel, 1998: 262, emphasis added).

More recently, informed by a social justice perspective (i.e. justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities and privileges within a society) a number of critical social scientists (e.g. Holden et al., 2017) and environmental advocacy associations (notably Friends of the Earth Scotland) are attempting to re-orient the term 'sustainability' around concepts of equity, social justice, participatory democracy and ecological limits. This more inclusive view of sustainability is captured by Agyeman et al. who argue that:

> Sustainability ... cannot be simply a 'green', or 'environmental' concern, important though 'environmental' aspects of sustainability are. A truly sustainable society is one where wider questions of social needs and welfare, and economic opportunity are integrally related to environmental limits imposed by supporting ecosystems. (2002: 78)

There is a requirement to define environmental sustainability that recognizes the need to ensure a better quality of life for *all*, in the present and into the future, in an equitable manner whilst living within the limits of ecosystems (Agyeman et al., 2016; Schlosberg, 2013); that is, an economy that meets emissions targets and is environmentally sustainable and socially just. This more inclusive definition focuses on four core areas: (1) quality of life; (2) present and future generations; (3) equity and justice in resource allocation; and (4) living within environmental limits. While mainstream corporate notions of sustainability have little to say about contemporary human conditions, this definition includes notions of both intra-generational and inter-generational equity (equality within and between different generation groups). This new, more egalitarian perspective of sustainability draws the connection between environmentalism, equity and fairness. Emerging definitions of environmental sustainability are shifting towards 'just sustainability' (the nexus between social justice and environmentalism), a broader approach that prioritizes social justice but does not downplay notions of ecological limits. The 'environmental justice' definition has more explicit emphasis on the social conditions of citizens and workers, both locally and internationally, and also acknowledges that multiple stakeholder decision making starts to address environmental and social inequality (see e.g. Agyeman, 2013).

The role of the 'state' in the environmental management discourse should not be downplayed or ignored. Whether through macro-economic policy, free trade agreements (e.g. NAFTA, TTIP), labour market reforms (e.g. Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations 2004), environmental legislation or investment in renewable technology, the state plays a central role in the economy. But most environmental studies mirror mainstream management by neglecting the close relationship of the state to corporate interests (Kelly, 1998). For example, governments project an image of neutrality on the issue of fracking, a drilling process used in the extraction of gas from shale rock, and down play environmental damage while claiming that shale gas has the potential to provide greater energy security, growth and jobs. Those opposed to fracking accuse governments and

fracking companies of providing misinformation and 'keeping secret the impacts of shale gas extraction' (BBC, 2014). Heyes and Nolan observe that

> The state is viewed as a benign force composed of multiple sites of authority none of which is dominant. It acts to create institutions and networks that facilitate information sharing, innovative behaviours, coordination and joint problem solving by social actors … Yet pluralism lacks a clear theory of the state, certainly lacks a theory of the *capitalist* state and therefore fails to problematize the nature of the state's relationship to capital and labour. (2010: 121, emphasis in the original)

The mainstream management approaches fail to engage with the dynamics of capitalism and the nature of the capitalist state. For example, mainstream approaches might experience difficulties accounting for the unwillingness of the state to strengthen the legal rights of employees and unions (Heyes and Nolan, 2010: 121). Examining sustainability and the workplace from a critical perspective also requires that researchers recognize macro social structures (e.g. population changes; social movements like Greenpeace), climate and environment agreements such as UK and EU environmental legislation, and distortions of international free trade.

At the workplace level, a critical environmental studies perspective recognizes the need for bottom-up, stakeholder-centred input 'which would, by necessity, involve a process we looked at …: dialogical communication' (Sumner, 2005: 91). This, it is argued, is best developed if deliberative democracy principles are employed and there is recognition by stakeholders of 'their interdependencies and power differences and the development of a shared will to move beyond the immediate self-interest of the affected parties' (Benn et al., 2009: 1572). Such stakeholder-centred approaches accept the inevitability of change in the nature of environmental risks or human perceptions of environmental risks, and assume that organizations have reflexive capacity to respond to the process of deliberation and 'mutual learning' between a range of stakeholders engaged in decision making (Carlsson and Berkes, 2005). A stakeholder-centred approach would also give greater prominence to effective followers. Potentially, follower voice would make every member of the organization an effective follower for pro-environmental creativity and innovation. Organizational leaders, senior managers and other employees are central to facilitating change and supporting better environmental outcomes. From a pluralist perspective, for example, employees and their union representatives could be involved in strategic decision making with potential for 'social partnership' (Johnstone and Ackers, 2015) for better environmental outcomes in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has established the role of HRM in enabling and improving environmental sustainability in the workplace. It has introduced the concept of sustainability and examined how this might be integrated within a workplace context to create positive environmental outcomes for organizations and society. It has critically evaluated a distinct body of literature illustrating the connection

between environmental sustainability, leadership and HRM. Given that questions of leadership, culture and managerial behaviour are increasingly seen to fall within the HRM field, this chapter brings together distinct streams of literature to focus on environmental sustainability and HRM in the workplace. The review of GHRM literature focuses attention on how selective HR practices can drive change through formal and informal levers. In this regard, the emerging GHRM literature focuses on a cluster of HR practices including selection, rewards, appraisal and training that can influence employees' attitudes and behaviours.

The literature highlights topics we have examined in previous chapters, the employment relationship and the process of employee voice that not only helps to create the leadership relationship but also enables or constrains environmental sustainability in organizations. The review of environmental leadership and organizational culture literature highlights the need to examine the role of leaders' influence in creating an environmentally sustainable workplace. While research consistently points to the need to examine the personal values held by leaders toward the environment, leadership scholars need to examine the socio-political context of a climate emergency, develop a more comprehensive picture of effective followership, and monitor the results of pro-environmental leadership.

CHAPTER REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your understanding of a low-carbon work system?
2. What is the role of leadership in the creation of an environmentally sustainable workplace?
3. Why is organizational culture important in transitioning to a sustainable workplace? How can leaders change the culture of their organization?
4. What role can HRM play in creating a sustainable workplace? What are the challenges?

ASSIGNMENT TASK: WHAT MOTIVATES PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP?

A significant body of research indicates that government regulation and legislation are a major driver of organizations' environmental activities. Several studies have reported that customers motivate organizations to adopt environmental management practices. The UK literature on strategic HRM suggests that general and line managers play a crucial role in enacting HR policies and practices. As internal stakeholders, senior managers and line managers are seen to be key to the adoption and enactment of sustainability initiatives. External governmental bodies, such as the Carbon Trust, can reduce information costs, provide technical assistance and coerce others by requiring adherence to environmental standards. Local community and the media stakeholders can also exercise influence on the

reputation of organizations that implement environmental improvements. Despite the research on organizations' sustainability strategies, it remains unclear why some organizations adopt sustainability initiatives beyond regulatory compliance.

Questions

1. Read Walker, H., Sisto, L. and McBain, D. (2008) 'Drivers and barriers to environmental supply chain management practices: lessons from the public and private sectors', *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management*, 14 (1): 69–85.
2. Thinking about 'drivers' and the momentum around 'climate emergency', what drives public and private sector organizations to implement environmental sustainability initiatives? Who are the key stakeholders that influence environmental sustainability in the workplace? And what are the barriers to workplace environmental sustainability?

GO ONLINE

Explore the real world of leadership by reading this case study:

- The BMW Group's Journey to Leadership in Sustainable Development Practice

Further your knowledge and build your bibliography for assignments by reading the recommended journal articles for this chapter.
Visit **https://study.sagepub.com/bratton**

VIDEO

Learn more about leadership in practice by watching the video conversation for this chapter.

Mollie Painter from Nottingham Trent University discusses her work on sustainability, the emerging importance of the triple bottom line and the concept of visionary leadership.

The video can be found at **https://study.sagepub.com/bratton**

See the inside front cover for the access code and instructions.

FURTHER READING

Davis, M.C. and Coan, P. (2015) 'Organizational change', in J.L. Robertson and J. Barling (eds), *The Psychology of Green Organizations*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 244–74.

Millar, C., Hind, P. and Magala, S. (2012) 'Sustainability and the need for change: organizational change and transformational vision', *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 25 (4): 489–500.

Robertson, J.L. and Barling, J. (2013) 'Greening organizations through leaders' influence on employees' pro-environmental behaviors', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 32: 176–94.

Shin, S.J., Jeong, I. and Bae, J. (2018) 'Do high-involvement HRM practices matter for worker creativity? A cross-level approach', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 29 (2): 260–85.

🔍 CASE STUDY: THE GREEN WORKPLACE

Background

This case study involves a conference centre within NHS Scotland. The case illustrates how sustainability initiatives have centred on event and conference planning, which provides an interesting context for the adoption of workplace pro-environmental behaviours (WPEBs). The event-planning industry more broadly presents unusual challenges not faced elsewhere in the economy, most notably that a significant proportion of the building's carbon use is consumed by customers rather than employees. Work teams were assigned primary responsibility for developing a culture whereby employees felt more confident and motivated towards the organization's sustainability strategy.

The organization

The conference centre is part of the NHS National Services Scotland (NSS), a non-departmental public body with an annual budget of roughly £600 million and a workforce of approximately 3,500 people across Scotland. Its remit is to provide expert advice and national strategic support services to the rest of NHS Scotland. The conference centre employs approximately 25 people, with about 40 per cent of workers unionized. The centre's primary clients are the Scottish Government and NHS health boards in Scotland. The venue offers state-of-the-art technology and meeting facilities, events management services, and an in-hours catering service specializing in organic and Fairtrade food and drink.

Thinking greener

To meet the sustainability needs of their clients, the conference centre's management developed the Think Greener sustainable conference and meeting package. The package offers products and services that incorporate social and environmental considerations, such as providing recycled paper, an organic buffet lunch, Fairtrade tea and coffee and a carbon-neutral taxi service. The conference centre's 'sustainability committee' or green group, a cross-functional employee committee chaired by the head of the centre, coordinates sustainability activities and initiatives. For example, the centre's sustainability

initiatives include: improving indoor air quality by purchasing plants chosen to absorb chemicals and remove air pollutants; reducing energy, paper and water through staff awareness campaigns; installing new technology; and encouraging employees and visitors to use public transportation.

Case exercise

On your own or in a study group:

1. Complete an online search for sustainable or green workplaces. What, in your view, are the key characteristics of an environmentally sustainable workplace? Think about how leadership, culture and HR practices influence environmental sustainability in the workplace (*Hint*: review Table 16.1).
2. How do leaders support a green or sustainability-oriented culture?
3. How do HR practices influence WPEBs?
4. Does everybody benefit from the outcomes of environmental sustainability?

Source of additional information

Cox, A., Higgins, T., Gloster, R. and Foley, B. (2012) 'The impact of workplace initiatives on low carbon behaviours: case study report', Scottish Government. Available at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/03/2237 (accessed 18 September 2019).

'English cities and regions … need to be innovative. But, local leaders … do not have a strong enough position to work with, by and through their networks to secure a smooth transition … Consequently, comprehensive and systematic local strategies for transition may suffer from lack of place-based leadership.'

Ayres and Beer, 2018