

Greening organizational behavior: An introduction to the special issue

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Summary

Each of the six articles in this Special Issue on “Greening Organizational Behavior” offers a perspective that provides unique insight and enriches our understanding of organizational greening. As a set, the articles span all levels of analysis, from a study of individual differences to an investigation of leadership dynamics to the analysis of firms and their institutional environments. Taken together, these articles illustrate the complex nature of organizational greening and highlight the need for research that adopts a systems perspective. The embedded and nested nature of organizational greening behavior requires additional research that investigates the interrelated influences of greening behavior by individual employees, work groups, and organizations. By recognizing and appreciating these multi-level dynamics, scholars of organizational behavior are poised to improve our understanding of effective organizational greening initiatives and thereby promote advancement toward environmental sustainability. Copyright © 2013 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction

Among the most pressing and prominent challenges facing organizations today is the urgent need to redress ongoing ecological degradation and prevent future degradation. Yet scholars of organizational behavior have been almost completely absent in discussions about how to promote environmentally responsible organizations. To date, scholarship about business and the natural environment has been dominated by studies that address firm- and industry-level phenomena, with little attention paid to intra-organizational processes and individual behaviors. As this special issue clearly shows, studies of organizational behavior can contribute unique insights about why and how some organizations are moving toward environmental sustainability. The six featured articles illustrate an array of novel theoretical and empirical approaches that comprise the leading edge of research on greening organizational behavior.

In putting together this special issue, our editorial goal was to identify novel, creative, and high-quality scholarship that sheds new light on the processes through which individuals, groups, and organizations can synchronize their actions to solve global ecological issues. The Call for Papers welcomed theoretical and empirical papers that explored individual and group phenomena relevant to the greening of organizations. More specifically, we sought manuscripts that examined individual and group environmental behaviors by drawing on relevant theories from a variety of disciplines and studying behavior in various types of organizations. We happily report that the submitted manuscripts did not disappoint!

In total, 50 manuscripts were submitted from 14 countries across Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America. The authors took a variety of approaches in their work, which used widely diverse samples, and deployed both

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conceptual and empirical lenses to gain new insights into greening organizational behavior. Following this journal's standard editorial processes, the editorial team read each manuscript and sent to reviewers those that were deemed suitable. Manuscripts underwent up to three rounds of revision before eventual acceptance or rejection. The six articles appearing in this special issue are the best of the 50 manuscripts submitted for consideration. We hope readers agree that publication of this carefully selected set of articles achieves our goal of identifying novel, creative, and high-quality scholarship for publication in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*.

Leading Edge Scholarship on Greening Organizational Behavior

Included in this special issue are one conceptual discussion and five empirical studies of greening organizational behavior. Here we provide brief summaries of these articles. Our summaries are presented in the order that the articles appear, which represents a progression that begins with the most micro-level analysis and proceeds through to those articles that adopt more macro-level perspectives. A particular strength of this set of articles is that each one adopts a multi-level perspective. Furthermore, each article makes a unique contribution to our understanding of greening organizational behavior and, in doing so, advances this important new field of inquiry. We thank the authors of these articles for providing a strong foundation for future work by both scholars who are newly engaged in understanding organizational greening behavior as well as work by scholars who have long been engaged in research on environmental sustainability.

The first article, titled "Relationships between Daily Affect and Pro-Environmental Behavior at Work: The Moderating Role of Pro-Environmental Attitude," by Bissing-Olson, Iyer, Fielding, and Zacher (2013), describes an innovative study of the relationship between daily affect and pro-environmental workplace behavior, conducted in Australia. The authors challenge the assumption that individuals are consistent from day to day in their propensity to perform pro-environmental behaviors and they argue that new insights can be gained by understanding the day-to-day fluctuations of pro-environmental behaviors. Specifically, Bissing-Olson *et al.* (2013) examined the degree to which daily positive affect and pro-environmental attitude predicted two different types of pro-environmental workplace behavior. Their results revealed that employees were more likely to carry out their required work tasks in environmentally friendly ways when they felt calm, relaxed, and content, providing evidence that affective states influence pro-environmental behavior at work. The unique and interesting conclusion from this study is that the emotions that predict environmentally friendly behavior need not be directed toward environmental issues; rather, incidental emotion about any target can influence pro-environmental behaviors in the workplace.

Bissing-Olson *et al.* (2013) also found that employees with more pro-environmental attitudes reported more pro-environmental behaviors. Furthermore, environmental attitudes moderated the influence of activated positive affect on proactive pro-environmental behavior: The effect on environmentally friendly behavior of transient positive emotions was stronger for employees with less positive environmental attitudes. One implication of this finding is that employers may be able to promote pro-environmental behavior in the workplace by fostering both pro-environmental attitudes, specifically, and also by enhancing positive affect among employees more generally.

The second article, titled "Greening Organizations through Leaders' Influence on Employees' Pro-Environmental Behaviors," by Robertson and Barling (2013), focuses on phenomena at the interpersonal level of analysis, looking specifically at relationships between leaders and followers. The study examines how leaders can effect organizational environmental change through their influence on employees' pro-environment passion and behavior. Using data from 139 leader-subordinate dyads in Canada and the U.S.A., Robertson and Barling (2013) found that transformational leadership behaviors that encouraged pro-environmental initiatives positively influenced their employees' pro-environmental passion and behavior. Consistent with the findings of Bissing-Olson *et al.* (2013), Robertson and Barling (2013, p. 179) emphasized the importance of positive emotion; specifically, they argue that an employee's "harmonious passion" (defined as positive emotion that results in an individual wanting to engage in pro-environmental behaviors) mediates the relationship between environmentally specific transformational leadership and employees'

pro-environment behaviors. Thus, harmonious passion appears to serve a function similar to the activated positive emotion described by Bissing-Olson *et al.* (2013). Taken together, the results of these two studies emphasize the importance of emotion as an influence on employee pro-environmental behaviors.

The third article, titled “Fostering Support for Work Floor Energy Conservation Policies: Accounting for Privacy Concerns,” by Bolderdijk, Steg, and Postmes (2013), considers phenomena that arise at the interface between individuals and organizations, focusing specifically on the use of electronic monitoring technology as a means of measuring and managing workplace pro-environmental behavior. Bolderdijk *et al.* (2013) acknowledged the value of obtaining objective measures of behavior, while also investigating the possible “dark side” of monitoring that invades the privacy of individual employees. On the one hand, electronic monitoring technologies offer a means for providing useful feedback to employees concerning their pro-environment behaviors, and such feedback can be effective in creating behavioral change. On the other hand, such monitoring may also elicit negative reactions if it raises privacy concerns.

Bolderdijk *et al.* (2013) described three studies that examine these issues; two studies were conducted in the Netherlands and one study was conducted in the U.S.A. Results revealed that privacy concerns were not raised by behavior monitoring *per se*; rather, privacy concerns were associated with the anticipated negative consequences of being monitored. One implication of these results is that managers may be able to improve the effectiveness of electronic monitoring technologies and minimize privacy concerns by communicating the positive benefits that result from improved environmental performance.

The fourth article, titled “Changing Behavior: Increasing the Effectiveness of Workplace Interventions in Creating Pro-Environmental Behavior Change,” by Unsworth, Dmitrieva, and Adriasola (2013), presents a conceptual model for improving our understanding of the relationship between the goal-directed behaviors of individual employees and the pro-environment interventions adopted by organizations. Central to their argument is the concept of self-concordance, which is the degree to which pro-environment behavior expresses an employee’s stable interests and values. Unsworth *et al.* (2013) argued that the degree to which an intervention-related behavioral goal is self-concordant should moderate the relationship between pro-environment goal activation and higher order goal activation. The activation of higher order goals is important to the potential success of organizational interventions, they assert, because it amplifies motivation toward goal pursuit. Additionally, the model predicts that engaging in a behavior that helps fulfill a personally important goal (that is, one connected to higher order goals) will generate positive affect, leading to further motivating potential.

Unsworth *et al.* (2013) also considered goal conflict situations, such as when an employee with egoistic values is expected to pursue environmental goals that make salient altruistic or biospheric values. The analysis of Unsworth *et al.* (2013) suggests that employees need not adhere to altruistic or biospheric values in order to engage in pro-environment behaviors. Rather, what is important is that the employee sees the behavior as expressing as many of their values or other long-term goals as possible. This means that an employee with egoistic values may be just as likely to engage in pro-environmental behavior as one with altruistic or biospheric values. The analysis extends previous work by proposing that people who perceive pro-environment behavior as self-concordant will engage in it regardless of what values it expresses.

The fifth article, titled “Environmental Standards and Labor Productivity: Understanding the Mechanisms that Sustain Sustainability,” by Delmas and Pekovic (2013), focuses on organizations as the unit of analysis in a study of the relationship between the adoption of environmental management standards and labor productivity. Motivating this research was a desire to advance our understanding of the relationship between environmental performance and competitive advantage by looking inside the so-called black box of organizational phenomena. Data from a sample of 5220 French firms reveal that firms that adopted environmental management standards also reported significantly higher labor productivity compared with those firms that did not adopt such standards.

To interpret their results, Delmas and Pekovic (2013) identified several possible explanatory processes. One explanation for the observed relationship between adoption of environmental management standards and labor productivity is that the adoption of environmental management standards is associated with higher employee commitment. Further, the authors argue, that environmentally proactive firms may also provide more training and

promote interpersonal contacts; in support of these arguments, the results reveal that increases in training and interpersonal contact contribute to subsequent improvements in labor productivity.

The final article, titled, "Exceptional Boards: Environmental Experience and Positive Deviance from Institutional Norms," by Walls and Hoffman (2013), focuses on the relationship between aspects of the institutional environment and organizational environmental actions. The authors strive to explain why some organizations deviate from institutional norms to engage in practices that protect or enhance the natural environment. For a sample of 294 U.S. listed firms, Walls and Hoffman (2013) found significant relationships between positive environmental deviance and both the past environmentally relevant experiences of members of the board of directors and firm centrality within field-level networks. More specifically, Walls and Hoffman (2013) found that network centrality was associated with *less* positive environmental deviance, whereas firms with directors who had more environmental experience were more likely to engage in positive environmental deviance.

As they interpret these results, Walls and Hoffman (2013) bring the focus back to the individual and highlight the important behavioral role of board members. Apparently, board members with prior environmental experience can incite a company to deviate positively from its peers even when facing strong network pressure to conform. The value of adopting a socio-psychological perspective is clearly evident in this article, which illustrates one fruitful avenue for examining organizational greening behavior as a phenomenon that operates at multiple levels of analysis and includes the actions of individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions.

In conclusion, we thank the authors of these six outstanding articles, while also acknowledging the work of all the other authors who submitted their research for consideration and possible publication in this special issue devoted to Greening Organizational Behavior. Editing this volume of the *Journal of Organizational Behavior* has revealed to us a groundswell of scholarship about this important phenomenon, and we look forward to the new insights that such research will stimulate as more of this work comes to fruition in the near future.

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