



The Meaning of Green Transformational Leadership in Sustainable Organizations: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Qualitative Study

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Abstract. This study aims to explore the experience of green transformational leadership (GTL) in realizing a sustainable organization. The approach used is qualitative with a hermeneutic phenomenological technique that allows researchers to interpret the deep meaning of the subjective experiences of leaders and organizational members related to green values that are internalized and practiced in the daily life of the organization. Data were collected through a literature study based on selected scientific articles, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results revealed that GTL dimensions (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) contribute to the formation of green culture and support sustainable learning, green innovation, and team resilience. GTL not only leads to pro-environmental individual behavior change, but also strengthens collective social structures that are adaptive to sustainability challenges. The research concludes that GTL is a strategic element in organizational transformation towards sustainability, and its development still needs to be integrated.

Keywords: Green Transformational Leadership, Hermeneutic Phenomenological, Qualitative Study.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, issues of sustainability and environmental responsibility have become a major concern in managerial and organizational practices, as public and global regulatory pressures on the environmental impact of industry increase. One strategic response to this issue is through a leadership approach that encourages changes in organizational behavior towards a more environmentally friendly direction, known as green transformational leadership (GTL). This leadership not only motivates individuals to behave in a pro-environmental manner but also creates an organizational climate that supports green innovation and long-term sustainability [1]. Previous research has shown that GTL plays an important role in driving green innovation and improving organizational environmental performance, especially through environmentally oriented human resource management practices or green HRM [1, 2]. In addition, GTL also has a close relationship with the organization's ability to generate employees' green creativity, both through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation [3]. Other research emphasizes the importance of employee involvement in

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the creative process and green thinking as a mediator between GTL and green innovation [4], and shows that green team resilience is a supporting factor in optimizing the influence of green leadership policies on organizational sustainability [5].

However, most previous studies have been quantitative and focused on the formal or corporate sector, leaving a gap in understanding how GTL dynamics play out qualitatively in different social and cultural contexts, including in local organizations or value-based communities. Therefore, it is important to explore how the role of GTL is understood, interpreted, and carried out in the daily practice of the organization, and how this impacts the encouragement of green innovation and pro-environmental behavior from the perspective of the organizational actors themselves. This study aims to explore in depth the role of green transformational leadership in shaping organizational behavior and culture oriented towards environmental innovation. Through a qualitative approach, this research seeks to capture the experiences, perceptions, and strategies executed by leaders in encouraging green creativity and employee engagement on environmental issues. The findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically in enriching the conceptual understanding of green transformational leadership in a more diverse local context, as well as providing practical benefits for organizations and stakeholders in developing leadership models that are adaptive to environmental challenges.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership theory was developed by Bass [6]. This theory describes leaders who inspire long-term vision and goals, increase follower motivation and loyalty, encourage creativity and innovation, and provide individualized attention. The four main dimensions are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration. Green Transformational Leadership is a direct derivative of Transformational Leadership Theory that was developed by incorporating environmental values into each leadership dimension. GTL extends Bass' theory into the pro-environmental realm by focusing on leadership to encourage green creativity and green thinking among employees [3, 4]. Previous research explains that green transformational leadership is a leadership style that integrates sustainability values into each dimension of transformational leadership [1]. GTL builds on transformational theory with the addition of an orientation on green team resilience and a focus on achieving environmental sustainability [5]. GTL is an extension of transformational leadership that explicitly encourages pro-environmental behavior through influencing, inspiring, and caring for individuals with a sustainability orientation [7].

2.2. Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory developed by Albert Bandura [8, 9]. This theory explains that individual behavior is shaped through observation, imitation, and modeling from others (especially authoritative figures), social learning occurs when a person imitates behaviors that they find useful, valued, or meaningful. Social learning theory emphasizes that individuals learn through observation and imitation of the behavior of others who are considered role models. In the context of green leadership, green

transformational leadership is derived from SLT by positioning the leader as a model of pro-environmental behavior that is observed, internalized, and emulated by employees. Green leaders demonstrate environmentally oriented values and concrete actions that not only reflect a commitment to innovation and sustainability, but also exert a strong influence on the formation of employees' ecological behavior [10, 11]. It is also affirmed that the leader's example has an important role in building the resilience of the green team as part of efforts to achieve organizational sustainability [5].

2.3. Green Transformational Leadership

Green transformational leadership is a form of transformational leadership that specifically emphasizes pro-environmental values and behaviors in influencing, inspiring, and empowering employees to achieve sustainable and environmentally-oriented organizational goals. GTL leaders not only motivate general employee performance, but also build ecological awareness, encourage green innovation, and create an organizational culture that cares about the environment [1, 3]. Characteristics of green transformational leadership include idealized influence where leaders show personal commitment to environmental values and become role models for employees in implementing green behavior [5]; inspirational motivation where leaders communicate a clear and meaningful vision of sustainability, which inspires employees to contribute to the organization's environmentally friendly goals [4]. In addition to idealized influence and inspirational motivation, green transformational leadership has the characteristic of intellectual stimulation where leaders encourage employees to think creatively and innovatively in solving environmental problems, for example through green product innovation or energy efficiency [1, 3]; Individualized consideration where leaders pay attention to the needs and potential of individual employees in developing awareness and pro-environmental behavior [2]. The additional color of GTL from social learning theory is role modeling [10, 11]. Leaders use psychosocial mechanisms so that followers learn from the leader. Leaders work implicitly or symbolically so that employees learn because they see, imitate, and imitate. The advantage when applying this model, the speed of employee adaptation is faster, automatic, and intuitive. Previous research mentions that green transformational leadership as a driver of green organizational culture where leaders contribute to building an organizational culture that supports environmentally friendly policies, such as through green HR management practices and the formation of teams that are resilient to environmental challenges [2, 5]; driving green innovation and green creativity where leaders encourage the creation of green innovation and creativity of environmentally oriented employees through the support of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation [3, 4].

2.4. The Role of Green Transformational Leadership in Sustainable Organizations

GTL not only plays a role in influencing individual behavior but also drives systemic change in organizations through green culture, team resilience, green innovation, and sustainable learning. In previous research, GTL plays an important role in shaping and strengthening green culture or organizational culture that supports pro-environmental behavior. Green transformational leaders promote ecological

values through consistent vision, communication, and example. This encourages employees to internalize sustainable green behaviors and strengthens sustainable organizational commitment [12]. In addition, GTL also plays a role in shaping green team resilience, which is the team's ability to remain adaptive, collaborative, and innovative in the face of external environmental pressures. The leader's example in facing ecological challenges builds the team's strength to be actively involved in achieving the organization's sustainability goals [5].

GTL facilitates the implementation of green human resource management (GHRM) practices oriented towards green training, environmentally sound employee recruitment, and employee empowerment in an ecological context. Through GHRM, green leaders encourage green creativity, which is the ability of individuals to generate innovative ideas that are environmentally friendly [13, 14]. In the context of external pressures such as environmental regulations or increasing market demands for sustainability, GTL plays a key role in driving exploratory green learning as an organizational learning process that actively seeks green solutions and radical innovations for long-term business viability [15]. The combination of green transformation leadership, green innovation, organizational support, and GHRM implementation directly contributes to improved sustainable business performance. This includes operational efficiency, waste reduction, competitiveness, and the organization's reputation for environmental responsibility [14].

3. Research Model

GTL is the main point of influence for employees through role modeling, inspirational communication, and intellectual encouragement. The leader's green values are then transmitted through daily interactions as a social learning theory process. The following picture of this research chart is explained in Appendix Table 1.

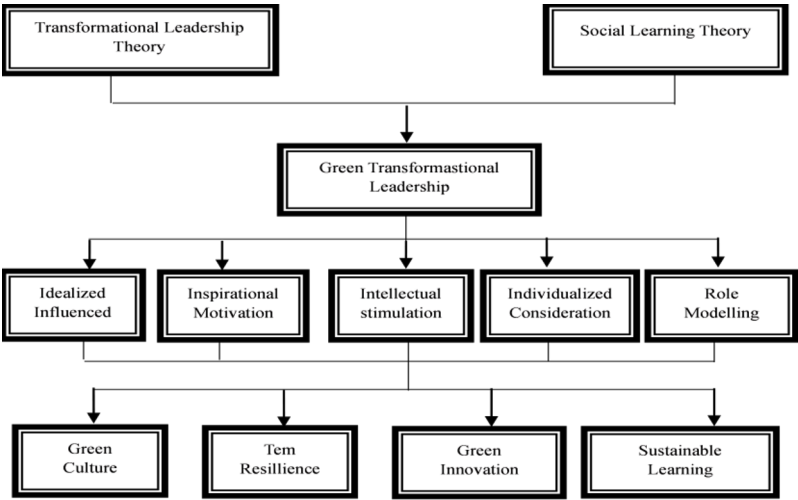


Figure 1: Research Chart of Green Transformational Leadership

4. Research Methods

4.1. Research Approach and Type

This research uses a qualitative method with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which aims to explore and understand the meaning of the experiences of leaders and organizational members in carrying out green transformation leadership. This approach is oriented towards interpretation, not just description; recognizes that research cannot be completely neutral because all experiences are understood through historical, cultural, and linguistic settings; focuses on the meaning of experiences in their context rather than just their essence; and recognizes existential research as part of understanding the phenomenon [16]. This approach was chosen because it is able to explore the subjective perceptions, values, and internalization process of GTL in the context of an organization that seeks to achieve sustainability.

4.2. Data Collection Technique

This study uses secondary data collected through the phenomenon of previous research related to GTL in reputable international journals (scopus) for the last 5 years with the help of Publish or Perish software. References to grand theory and research method selection are also downloaded from the Publish or Perish software where the references are classified as reputable national journals (Scopus).

4.3. Research Focus

The focus of this research is to provide information on the subjective experiences of previous research when performing transformational leadership roles, and involves how green leadership values are understood, applied, and transmitted in the daily life of the organization.

4.4. Data Analysis Technique

According to Laverty, the stages of data analysis include reading and understanding the entire data, identifying meaningful statements, developing essential themes, contextual interpretation, researcher reflection, and compiling thematic narratives [16]. The process began with repeated readings of data obtained from primary literature in the form of selected journal articles in order for the research to gain a thorough understanding of the context and experiences reported by previous authors. Pieces of text that contained meaning about the GTL experience were marked and grouped as units of meaning. The units of meaning were analyzed to find key themes that reflected collective experiences or meanings. Interpretation was made of these themes within the social, cultural and organizational context in which the experience occurred. This process not only describes what is experienced, but also examines why and how meaning is formed and carried out. In a hermeneutic approach, research is not neutral, but actively engaged. Therefore, reflection on the research position, background, and conceptual perspective is used to enrich the meaning of the data without obscuring the existing reality. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of interpretative descriptive narratives that connect the experience with the dimensions of GTL and its relevance to transformational leadership theory and social learning theory.

5. Results and Discussion

In the initial stage, this research screened articles through PoP software using publication data from reputable international journals. Over the past 5 years, there were more than 200 articles discussing green transformational leadership. The breadth of the data led to the research only using the top 5 research references in the screening to describe the content of green transformational leadership. The results of reading and understanding the data (Appendix Table 1) show that green transformational leadership is a leadership style that encourages pro-environmental behavior, green innovation, and employee engagement through sustainability inspiration, role modeling, and support for creativity and environmental learning in the organization. [1-5]. From the results of reading and understanding, the results of identifying meaningful statements used in relation to GTL (appendix table 1) are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and role modelling. These related main themes lead to green culture, team resilience, green innovation, and sustainable learning (Table 1). A contextual interpretation of why and how these meanings were formed was developed as follows:

5.1. Green Culture

Green culture serves as a root and fertile ground for the growth of green transformational leadership. In previous research, green culture acts as a mediator in the relationship between green ability motivation opportunity (green AMO) and transformational leadership effectiveness [17]. Green culture encourages leaders to internalize environmental values, act as role models in green practices, communicate a sustainable vision to employees. When the organizational culture supports environmental values, the leadership style that emerges is also conditioned to be green transformational. Green culture not only influences employee behavior, but also creates a fertile social context for the growth of green leadership [12]. In an environment that instills a green culture, leaders have the legitimacy, motivation, and moral pressure to implement GTL. In addition, GTL can also be seen as the result of the internalization of a strong green culture, not just an individual initiative.

5.2. Team Resilience

Team resilience is the collective capacity of a team to adapt, recover and thrive under pressure, challenge and change, including in the context of environmental change and sustainability demands. Team resilience and GTL can be mutually reinforcing. Previous research has explained that green team resilience strengthens GTL in promoting environmental sustainability [5]. When teams are resilient in the face of environmental pressures (both external and internal), they are able to align with the green leader's vision, support green initiatives more actively, and become agents of change within the organization. Thus, team resilience can also be the social and psychological foundation that allows GTL to grow and be accepted collectively. Moreover, resilience teams are not only formed from resilient individuals, but through patterns of social interaction, open communication and psychological support within the team [18]. Leadership that supports the strengthening of resilience teams tends to be characterized by the ability to give positive meaning to challenges, build team trust

and solidarity, provide emotional support and resources to rise. In a two-way relationship, resilient teams create social conditions that favor the emergence of GTL, as leaders can work with teams that are adaptive to green change, able to execute a sustainable vision, and are resilient in the face of ecological challenges. Conversely, GTL can also foster team resilience by providing inspiration and hope in the face of crisis, encouraging teams to think innovatively, and providing individual attention and support in a collective context.

5.3. Green Innovation

Green innovation refers to the development of products, processes, or organizational policies that are oriented towards reducing environmental impact and continuous improvement. Green transformational leadership and green innovation can be mutually reinforcing. Previous studies have shown that GTL plays an important role in inspiring innovative green ideas through motivation, role modeling, and support for creative thinking [1, 4, 14]. In addition, GTL leaders create a psychological and structural environment that allows teams to explore green solutions [4]. GTL also integrates sustainability values into organizational processes, thereby accelerating the adoption of environmentally friendly product and process innovations [1]. Previous studies highlight the flip side, that the drive for green innovation in organizations can create green leadership demands [15, 19, 20]. When environmental innovation becomes a priority, leaders need to demonstrate transformational leadership focused on sustainability. External pressures, such as regulation and market expectations for green innovation, drive organizations to shape leaders with GTL capacity to meet these challenges [15]. In the long run, green innovation practices become the social and cultural platform on which GTL values are developed and institutionalized [20]. In a two-way relationship, GTL motivates and empowers teams to produce green innovations. Conversely, the success and necessity of green innovation drives the birth of a transformative green leadership style.

5.3. Sustainable Learning

In the context of green transformational leadership, sustainable learning grows through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Leaders who demonstrate idealized influence not only model morals and integrity, but also commitment to sustainable learning and environmental values. Exemplary leaders create trust and a sense of security within the team, which is essential for a culture of knowledge sharing and collective learning [21]. Leaders who consistently demonstrate green practices and the spirit of learning will rub off on team members and form a culture of continuous learning. Leaders with the inspirational motivation dimension inspire followers with a shared vision that is meaningful and uplifting. Educational transformation, including continuous learning, is fueled by leaders who can articulate long-term goals and generate intrinsic motivation [22]. In GTL, leaders create a long-term sustainability vision that incorporates a spirit of continuous learning to meet changing climate, regulatory and environmental challenges.

Intellectual stimulation in GTL encourages employees to think critically, evaluate old ways of working, and create innovative solutions. An intellectually stimulating work environment increases team efficacy and psychological safety, which in turn

supports openness in the exploration of new knowledge [21]. In the context of GTL, leaders encourage employees to be open to green learning, sustainable technologies, and innovations that support sustainability. Individualized consideration refers to the leader's attention to the personal needs and development of each team member. In continuous learning, leaders recognize individual learning styles, potentials, and barriers, and provide appropriate support. Such attention increases trust and willingness to share knowledge, two essentials in a culture of continuous learning. Leaders assist individuals to grow in green competencies and integrate sustainability values in their work.

Leaders' role modeling behavior contributes directly to continuous learning because through exemplary actions, whether in work engagement, environmental commitment, or innovation, leaders create a social learning environment where employees learn not through instruction but through observation, imitation, and internalization of values. The managerial skills of leaders in the context of transformational leadership not only influence direct performance but also create a work environment that encourages learning and work engagement [23]. Leaders' pro-environmental behaviors become role models that are emulated, especially in the context of a green organizational culture [10]. GTL influences employees' green behavior through a social learning process, with leaders as role models who provide moral and emotional influences [24].

6. Conclusion

Green Transformational Leadership (GTL) plays a critical role in shaping green organizational culture, facilitating continuous learning, and encouraging innovation and team resilience in the face of sustainability challenges. GTL is not just a leadership style, but also a social process that takes place through daily interactions between leaders and organizational members. The dimensions of GTL that grow out of transformational leadership theory such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, contribute significantly to increasing environmental awareness, shaping pro-environmental behavior (green culture and green innovation), increasing team resilience and continuous collective learning in organizations. Meanwhile, GTL, which grows from social learning theories such as role modeling, shows leaders as role models that are observed, imitated, and internalized by employees. Thus, through exemplary green commitment, innovation, and work engagement, leaders can create a social learning environment that reinforces sustainable ecological change. GTL is not only influenced by green culture and green innovation, but also reinforces and extends both.

In this context, GTL contributes to building and institutionalizing green culture and green innovation as part of the organization's identity. Team resilience can be an amplifier between GTL and sustainability success. When leaders are able to build team solidarity and psychological strength, the process of innovation and adaptation to ecological challenges runs more effectively. This research concludes that GTL is the main motor of sustainability organizational transformation. Therefore, the development of green transformational leadership through social learning, green culture formation, innovation strengthening systems and continuous learning is a strategic agenda that needs to be fostered. Future research is recommended to explore the field context directly. Both in the context of formal organizations and local wisdom-based communities, in order to enrich the understanding of GTL dynamics

contextually and applicatively, including its interaction with organizational political dynamics and green technology adoption.

Disclosure of Interests. Ony Suharsono was responsible for the conception and design of the study, qualitative data analysis, and preparation of the initial draft of the article. Suharnomo conducted the primary literature search, contributed to the thematic analysis and interpretation of the data within a hermeneutic phenomenological framework, and revised the content. Mahfudz handled conforming the article to the journal template, editing language and academic style, and finalizing and preparing the manuscript for publication.

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Appendix.

Table 1. Data PoP Green Transformational Leadership

Cites	Author	Title	Year	Source
2304	B.M. Bass	From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision	1990	Organizational Dynamics
1317	S.K. Singh	Green innovation and environmental performance: The role of green transformational leadership and green human resource management	2020	Technological Forecasting and Social Change
962	S.M. Lavery	Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of Historical and Methodological Considerations	2003	International Journal of Qualitative Methods
336	W. Li	Unlocking employees' green creativity: The effects of green	2020	Journal of Cleaner Production

Cites	Author	Title	Year	Source
		transformational leadership, green intrinsic, and extrinsic motivation		
266	S. Begum	Does green transformational leadership lead to green innovation? The role of green thinking and creative process engagement	2022	Business Strategy and the Environment
215	M. Farrukh	Fostering employee's pro-environmental behavior through green transformational leadership, green human resource management and environmental knowledge	2022	Technological Forecasting and Social Change
177	R. Farooq	Do green human resource management and self-efficacy facilitate green creativity? A study of luxury hotels and resorts	2022	Journal of Sustainable Tourism
177	S. Çop	Achieving environmental sustainability through green transformational leadership policy: Can green team resilience help?	2021	Business Strategy and the Environment
113	F.H. Awan	Stimulating environmental performance via green human resource management, green transformational leadership, and green innovation: a mediation-moderation model	2023	Environmental Science and Pollution Research
113	Z. Hameed	How GHRM is related to green creativity? A moderated mediation model of green transformational leadership and green perceived organizational support	2022	International Journal of Manpower
73	R. Cui	Shaping sustainable development: External environmental pressure, exploratory green learning, and radical green innovation	2022	Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management
73	Y.S. Rizvi	The simultaneous effect of green ability-motivation-opportunity and transformational leadership in environment management: the mediating role of green culture		
68	W. Zhao	The impact of green transformational leadership, green HRM, green innovation and organizational support on the sustainable business	2022	Economic Research Ekonomiska Istrazivanja

Cites	Author	Title	Year	Source
		performance: evidence from China		
56	A. Bandura	Self-referent mechanisms in social learning theory	1979	American Psychologist
48	A. Bandura	Social Learning Theory of Aggression	2017	Control of Aggression Implications from Basic Research
25	M. Sarkar	Developing Individual and Team Resilience in Elite Sport: Research to Practice	2022	Journal of Sport Psychology in Action
5	X. Liu	Green Product Innovation via Green Transformational Leadership and employees' OCBE: The Moderating Role of Green Organizational Climate– Empirical Evidence from China' Manufacturing Enterprises	2022	Polish Journal of Environmental Studies
0	D.K. Priatna	Employee ecological behavior through green transformational leadership: the mediating role of green HRM practices and green organizational climate	2025	Journal of Management Development
0	J.G. Vargas-Hernandez	Green culture pro-environmental behaviors and organizational environmental sustainability on green human resources management and green transformation	2024	Green Hrm Awareness and Training in Higher Education Institutions

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