

From Awareness to Action: How Green Skills Shape Sustainable Behaviours in the Workplace

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Abstract: *The pressing need for sustainable development has highlighted the significance of developing green skills in the workplace. The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate how the acquisition of green skills influences employees' sustainable behaviours in organisational settings. The study looks at the transition from environmental awareness to the practical implementation of sustainable practices using semi-structured interviews with 20 professionals from various industries. According to the findings, developing green skills helps people gain a better understanding of environmental issues while also instilling a sense of personal responsibility and empowerment. Furthermore, the study emphasises the importance of organisational support, leadership commitment, and collaborative learning environments in translating green skills into practical actions. The study adds to our understanding of the complex interplay between individual competencies, organisational factors and behavioural change for sustainability.*

Key Words: *Green skills, sustainable behaviours, workplace sustainability, environmental awareness.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

In the face of escalating environmental challenges, sustainability has emerged as a critical global concern. Workplaces, as major sources of resource consumption and environmental impact, play an important role in driving positive change towards a more sustainable future (Ones & Dilchert, 2012). While environmental awareness has grown in recent years, translating it into concrete actions remains a significant challenge (Abrahamse & Steg, 2013). Green skills, which include the knowledge, attitudes, and practical competencies required for sustainable development, have emerged as an important factor in closing the gap (Pavlova, 2018). The importance of sustainable practices in today's corporate landscape has never been greater. Green skills include a thorough understanding of environmental issues, practical problem-solving abilities, and a steadfast commitment to the implementation of sustainable practices. This research study, titled "From Awareness to Action: How Green Skills Shape Sustainable Behaviours in the Workplace," aims to shed light on the critical role of green skills in fostering environmentally sustainable behaviours among employees. This qualitative study investigates the dynamic interplay between the acquisition of green skills and the manifestation of sustainable behaviours among employees in various organisational contexts, bridging the gap between environmental awareness and practical action. The study aims to elucidate the intricate mechanisms and factors that catalyse the transition from environmental awareness to tangible actions by investigating the lived experiences and perspectives of professionals from a variety of industries. This study aims to provide actionable insights into how organisations can effectively integrate green skills development into their human resource strategies to improve overall sustainability performance.

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2. RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY:

This study used a qualitative research design to gain a thorough understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives on green skills and sustainable workplace behaviours. A phenomenological approach was chosen to capture the lived experiences and subjective meanings associated with the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study had 20 participants from a variety of organisations and industries, including manufacturing, technology, healthcare and education. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants had relevant experiences and knowledge about green skills and sustainable practices in their workplaces (Patton, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' perspectives on the following key topics:

1. Understanding the value of green skills in the workplace.
2. Personal experiences and journeys in learning green skills.
3. Factors that facilitated or hindered the use of green skills at work.
4. The perceived impact of green skills on sustainable behaviours and practices in the organisation.
5. Organisational initiatives to promote green skills and sustainability.

The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3. DATA ANALYSIS:

The data analysis process adhered to the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) principles (Smith et al., 2009). This method enabled a thorough examination of the participants' lived experiences and the meanings they assigned to the phenomenon under investigation.

The analysis included the following steps:

1. Reading and re-reading transcripts to familiarise with the data.
2. Coding exploratory comments and identifying potential themes.
3. Identifying emerging themes from individual transcripts.
4. Identifying connections and patterns between cases to create overarching themes.
5. Refine themes iteratively through comparison and interpretation.
6. Creating a narrative account of the findings with quotes from participants.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) used member checking and peer debriefing techniques to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. Participants had the opportunity to review and validate their account interpretations and peer debriefing sessions with experienced qualitative researchers helped to maintain analytical rigour and reduce potential biases.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Several key themes emerged from the interview data analysis, shedding light on the role of green skills in shaping sustainable workplace behaviours. These themes are thoroughly discussed, supported by relevant quotes from participants.

Theme 1: Environmental Awareness and Concern as a Catalyst

Participants consistently emphasised the importance of environmental awareness and concern as motivators for learning green skills and adopting sustainable behaviours. Many people expressed a strong sense of responsibility for environmental protection and a desire to help shape a more sustainable future.

"I believe it all begins with becoming aware of the environmental challenges we face. Once you understand the gravity of the situation, it becomes a moral imperative to take action." (Participant 8; Manufacturing Industry)

"For me, it was a personal journey of learning about climate change and the effects of human activities on the environment. That piqued my interest in learning green skills and incorporating sustainable practices into my work." (Participant 14; Education Sector)

This theme is consistent with previous research indicating that environmental awareness and concern are strong predictors of pro-environmental behaviour (Zsóka et al., 2013; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

Theme 2: Green Skills as Enablers of Practical Action

Participants emphasised the importance of green skills in translating environmental awareness into tangible actions and sustainable behaviours in the workplace. The acquisition of relevant knowledge, technical competencies, and problem-solving abilities enabled them to identify areas for improvement and implement long-term solutions.

"Understanding sustainable practices and green technologies was eye-opening. It provided me with the necessary tools and knowledge to make a real difference at work." (Participant 6; Technology Company)

"Green skills are not just about theory; they equip you with practical skills to assess environmental impacts, optimise processes, and implement sustainable solutions." (Participant 11; Healthcare Organisation)

This finding supports the idea that green skills act as a link between environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour, allowing people to effectively contribute to sustainability efforts (Pavlova, 2018; Rosenberg et al., 2021).

Theme 3: Organizational Support and Enabling Factors

Participants emphasised the significance of organisational support and enabling factors in facilitating the application of green skills and promoting sustainable behaviour. Leadership commitment, collaborative learning environments, and incentives or recognition for long-term initiatives were all identified as important factors.

"Having the support of our leadership team and dedicated resources for sustainability initiatives made a significant difference. It made it clear that this is a top priority for the organisation." (Participant 3; Manufacturing Industry)

"We hold regular training sessions and knowledge-sharing forums where we can learn from one another's experiences and best practices. It fosters a collaborative environment for continuous improvement. (Participant 17; Technology Company).

These findings are consistent with previous research emphasising the importance of organisational factors such as leadership support, resource allocation, and a supportive culture in fostering sustainability-oriented behaviours and practices (Lozano et al., 2015; Ones & Dilchert, 2012).

Theme 4: Personal Empowerment and Sense of Agency

Participants reported feeling empowered and in control as a result of their green skills and involvement in sustainable practices. They felt more responsible and confident in their ability to contribute to positive environmental change.

"Developing green skills has made me feel more empowered and capable of making a difference, not just at work but also in my personal life." (Participant 9; Education Sector).

"It feels empowering to know that my actions, no matter how small, can have a positive impact on the environment. Green skills have given me the tools to take action and contribute to the solution." (Participant 19; Healthcare Organisation).

This theme aligns with the concept of perceived behavioural control, a key component of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which suggests that individuals are more likely to engage in desired behaviours when they perceive a greater sense of control and agency over the behaviour.

Theme 5: Challenges and Barriers

While participants acknowledged the positive impact of green skills on sustainable behaviours, they also discussed the various challenges and barriers they encountered along the way. These included organisational inertia, a scarcity of resources, aversion to change, and competing priorities.

"It can be frustrating when you face resistance or a lack of understanding from coworkers or management. Change is always difficult, and sustainability initiatives may take a back seat to other priorities." (Participant 5; Manufacturing Industry)

"One of the most significant challenges is the initial investment required to implement sustainable solutions. It can be difficult to raise funds and persuade stakeholders of the long-term benefits." (Participant 12; Technology Company)

These challenges highlight the importance of a comprehensive approach that addresses both individual and organisational factors in order to effectively promote sustainable behaviours.

5. CONCLUSION:

This qualitative study helps us understand how green skills shape sustainable workplace behaviours. The findings emphasise the multifaceted role of green skills in increasing environmental knowledge and awareness, cultivating sustainable mindsets and attitudes, and providing practical skills for implementing eco-friendly practices. Organisations can empower their workforce to translate environmental awareness into tangible actions, thereby driving long-term change and contributing to a more environmentally responsible future. The incorporation of green skill development into workplace training programmes and educational curricula emerges as a critical step in fostering a sustainable organisational culture.

Embedding green skills into professional development initiatives and collaborating with educational institutions to incorporate these competencies into relevant curricula can provide current and future employees with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively drive sustainability practices. Furthermore, this study emphasises the importance of organisational support and a conducive environment for green skills to thrive and translate into sustainable behaviours. Leadership commitment, resource allocation, and the development of collaborative learning platforms are critical factors in enabling the practical application of green skills and fostering a shared sense of responsibility for environmental stewardship. While the path to sustainability presents challenges and obstacles, the findings emphasise the empowering and motivating nature of green skills.

Individuals with green skills can become positive change agents by cultivating a sense of personal agency and responsibility, advocating for sustainable practices within their organisations and inspiring others to join the collective effort. In conclusion, this study emphasises the critical role of green skills in closing the gap between environmental

awareness and tangible action. Organisations can cultivate a workforce that is not only knowledgeable about sustainability, but also equipped with the necessary tools and mindsets to drive meaningful change towards a more sustainable future by prioritising the development and integration of these critical competencies.

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