



Research article

Improving environmental performance through unit-level organizational citizenship behaviors for the environment: A capability perspective

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ABSTRACT

Organizational citizenship behaviors for the environment (OCBEs) are increasingly advocated as a means of complementing formal practices in improving environmental performance. Adopting a capability perspective, we propose that a firm's employee involvement capability translates into environmental performance through the manifestation of unit-level OCBEs, and that this relationship is amplified by a shared vision capability. In a cross-country and multi-industry sample of 170 firms, we find support for our hypotheses, shedding light on contextual determinants of OCBEs, and on how firms may engender a positive relationship between top-down environmental initiatives and bottom-up behaviors.

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1. Introduction

Organizational citizenship behaviors for the environment (OCBEs), defined as “individual and discretionary social behaviors not explicitly recognized by the formal reward system and contributing to improve the effectiveness of environmental management of organizations” (Boiral, 2009, p. 223), are a topic of burgeoning interest to researchers of corporate greening (Boiral et al., 2013; Daily et al., 2009; Lamm et al., 2013, 2014; Paillé et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Temminck et al., 2013; Weaver et al., 2014). Most of the prior work in this area has focused on antecedents of OCBEs at the individual level (Norton et al., 2015), such as psychological empowerment (Lamm et al., 2014), affective commitment (Lamm et al., 2013; Temminck et al., 2013), environmental values and perceived behavioral control (Boiral et al., 2013), job commitment and satisfaction (Paillé and Boiral, 2013; Paillé and Mejía-Morelos, 2014), perceived organizational and supervisory support (Paillé et al., 2013; Paillé and Raineri, 2015; Raineri and Paillé, 2015), commitment to colleagues, and intention to help

others (Paillé et al., 2015).

However, relatively little research has looked at the contextual factors that enable the manifestation of OCBEs at the unit level (e.g., Paillé et al., 2014). This is important because without an appropriate understanding of the contextual determinants of OCBEs, managers may overlook invaluable opportunities to enhance firms' environmental performance, which may tap into employees' tacit knowledge and reap the benefits of their involvement beyond formal management systems (Boiral, 2009; Boiral and Paillé, 2012; Taylor et al., 2012).

One way by which managers endeavor to engage their workforces in corporate greening efforts is by developing a capability of integrating information conveyed by employees into the development of environmental practices (e.g., Sharma and Henriques, 2005; Tung et al., 2014), which we define as employee involvement capability. Although this employee involvement capability may improve environmental performance through formal environmental practices (Wagner, 2011), current research suggests that informal and voluntary green behaviors of employees (Lülfes and Hahn, 2013; Norton et al., 2015; Temminck et al., 2013), such as OCBEs, may also act as alternative mechanisms.

The purpose of this paper is to theorize and test the relationships between a firms' employee involvement capability, the

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manifestation of OCBEs at the unit-level, and environmental performance. In particular, we are interested in understanding contextual factors that may reinforce both formal (i.e., employee involvement capability) and informal (i.e., OCBEs) aspects of corporate greening. To this end, we consider how the presence of a shared vision capability may complement a firm's employee involvement capability, and intensify the manifestation of OCBEs at the unit-level.

Current evidence suggests that sharing a vision with employees is positively associated with the adoption of proactive environmental practices (Aragón-Correa et al., 2008; Torugsa et al., 2012). Because shared vision implies that employees contribute to defining a firm's objectives (Aragón-Correa et al., 2008), they may attach more meaning and importance to their involvement in environmental management (Oswald et al., 1994), and hence engage more in behaviors that go beyond their obligations or job descriptions (Ramus and Killmer, 2007), such as OCBEs.

By applying a capability perspective to the study of OCBEs, we contribute to the literature in corporate greening and voluntary green behaviors of employees in important ways. First, our focus on how employee involvement and shared vision capabilities interact and link to OCBEs at the unit level sheds light on how firms may engender a positive relationship between top-down environmental initiatives and bottom-up behaviors, that is, between required and voluntary employee green behaviors (Norton et al., 2015). This is particularly relevant as previous research demonstrates this relationship is not always positive neither significant (Norton et al., 2014). Second, to date few studies have examined the relationship between OCBEs and environmental performance (e.g., Paillé et al., 2014; Roy et al., 2013). We add to previous studies by considering perceptions of the manifestation of OCBEs at the unit level, since citizenship behaviors are likely to impact organizational outcomes especially when exhibited in large numbers and considered in the aggregate (Organ, 1988). In particular, we heed Norton et al. (2015) recent call for research into the conditions under which the antecedents of employee green behaviors are particularly influential, and how such behaviors result in important outcomes.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, we develop our hypotheses linking a formal employee involvement capability to OCBEs and environmental performance, and establish the role of a shared vision capability in magnifying these relationships. Next, we describe and discuss our methods and results, testing our hypotheses in a cross-country and multi-industry sample of 170 firms. Last, we highlight the implications of our findings for corporate greening theory and practice, and outline

limitations and avenues for future research. Fig. 1 illustrates our hypotheses and serves as a roadmap for our study.

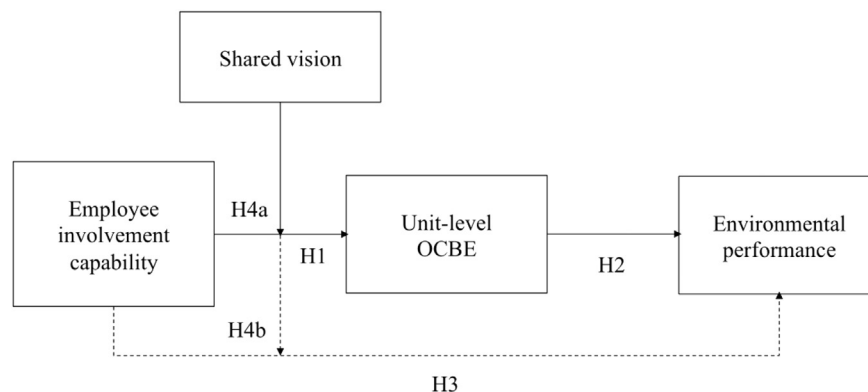
2. Theory development

2.1. Employee involvement, unit-level OCBEs, and environmental performance

The contribution of employee involvement to corporate greening has been addressed mainly through three different perspectives in the Organizations and the Natural Environment (ONE) literature. Studies have framed employee involvement as an operations or total quality management tool, a strategic firm capability, or as an individual behavior. These multiple facets of employee involvement are rather complementary than exclusive, but have been mostly explored in isolation.

From an operations management perspective, employee involvement has been related to energy and natural resources conservation (Kornbluh et al., 1985), reduction in toxic releases (Bunge et al., 1996; Kitazawa and Sarkis, 2000; Ruiz-Quintanilla et al., 1996), green design (Florida, 1996), cleaner technology (Remmen and Lorentzen, 2000), cost savings and environmental benefits in general (Hanna et al., 2000; Theyel, 2000). Through the lenses of the natural-resource-based view (NRBV) of the firm (Hart, 1995), employees are key stakeholders and their involvement is seen as a strategic capability: firms that develop the ability of integrating employees have been linked to more advanced environmental practices (Buyse and Verbeke, 2003; Darnall et al., 2008; Sharma and Henriques, 2005). Finally, from a behavioral perspective, employees' tacit knowledge and informal behaviors have been associated with significant environmental improvements (Boiral, 2005; Rothenberg, 2003), such as the identification of pollution sources and the management of emergency situations (Boiral, 2002). In this paper, we focus on the two latter perspectives in order to provide a more encompassing view of employee involvement in corporate greening, which considers the relationships between formal and informal green behaviors.

Across studies, employee involvement has been observed and measured in various ways, mainly through employee suggestions and participation in project teams. These types of involvement can encompass both formal and informal behaviors. For example, suggestions can occur spontaneously or via institutionalized means, and participation in project teams may be mandatory or voluntary. Although recent studies have started to simultaneously address both task-related and proactive green behaviors (e.g., Bissing-Olson et al., 2013; Norton et al., 2014, 2015), previous



Note: Solid arrows depict direct relationships; dashed arrows depict indirect relationships

Fig. 1. Research model.

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