



## Introduction

**Abstract** This chapter provides an introduction to the greening of workplaces. The core of this book is developed through three key ideas. The first is that the looming environmental crisis challenges the viability of the general choices that underlie the development of our society. Second, the perspective adopted in this book implies approaching greening from the point of view of individuals in nonmanagerial positions. Third greening is examined through one characteristic often attributed to organizations is their power to act—a power that is itself diluted within a vague and elusive whole.

**Keywords** Overview · Aims · Employee level

Capitalist production only develops [...] by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker.

K. Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1

This book examines the greening of workplaces. The term “greening of workplaces” will be used to mean the various measures implemented by and within organizations with the aim of making workplaces more environmentally friendly, less energy-intensive, and more consistent with the ethical standards imposed by the need to take environmental issues into consideration.

The idea for this book was borne out of a personal realization, which is that there is an inherent contradiction in the very nature of our current understanding of the role of human agency in environmental degradation. Sources of GHG emissions are either natural or man-made. Natural emission sources include volcanoes, forest fires, and natural processes (source: ALCEN Corporate Foundation). Most natural sources (around 43%) are related to exchange processes between the oceans and the atmosphere, while emissions generated by nonhuman living beings and soil decomposition account for the remainder in roughly equal measure (28.5%). 87% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from human activities are generated by fossil fuel combustion (coal, oil, and natural gas). Finally, another interesting fact is that the management (collection and treatment) of waste generated globally by human activities is estimated to account for 5% of GHG emissions (source: Futura, 1 November 2018).

In the case of man-made sources, GHG emissions are generated by businesses and households, the two main categories of operators. Stern (2000) noted that “much of the environmental impact of human activity results from the actions of organizations, not individuals, and from organizational decisions about production and service provision, not consumption” (p. 524). Similarly, Davis and Challenger (2009) reported that “according to recent government statistics, the impact of the non-domestic sector (e.g. services, public sector and industry) is significantly higher than that of residential users” (p. 112). In other words, the contradiction is this: the knowledge developed in this area over the last thirty years shows that efforts so far have largely focused on households rather than organizations, despite the overwhelming evidence that businesses have a significantly greater impact on the environment than households. Put simply, we know a lot about agents that have a minor impact and comparatively less about those that do the most harm to the environment.

Three key ideas lie at the core of this book.

The first is that the looming environmental crisis challenges the viability of the general choices that underlie the development of our society. More generally, the crisis sheds doubt on the ability and willingness of major greenhouse gas emitters to overhaul the human and industrial organization on which our model of economic development is based (Bell, Greene, Fisher, & Baum, 2001). However, the recent environmental literature provides evidence of numerous initiatives geared toward taking environmental considerations into account at all levels within organizations. Both the professional and the generalist literature

include examples of publications aimed at setting out the simple procedures, habits, and routines that we can all perform at work in order to reduce the carbon footprint on a day-to-day basis. The value of such publications lies in the fact that they help to draw attention to the simplicity of environmental actions at an individual level. However, they also neglect to consider the influence of a whole range of contextual factors that have the potential to promote personal inertia. Paradoxically, a high degree of routinization in daily tasks is needed for simple eco-friendly habits to become embedded, raising the question of the importance accorded to the environment in work processes.

Second, the perspective adopted in this book implies approaching greening from the point of view of individuals in nonmanagerial positions. The main reason for examining the question from this perspective is that the individual level remains the least studied level of investigation. The point is to direct the focus of attention toward individuals who are not responsible for managing a team or who have not been delegated any authority—in other words, toward individuals acting as subordinates in roles and positions overseen and managed by other people acting as their superiors. Put differently, the aim is to understand how and why a subordinate behaves (or does not behave) in a particular way by taking environmental considerations and characteristics into account in their day-to-day work. The interesting point is that, though they may lack the powers and attributes of a manager, subordinates can demonstrate leadership in some circumstances. Someone in a managerial position may lack leadership, while someone who is not a manager may demonstrate leadership skills. What is true in general is also true at an environmental level. It seems to me that this distinction is crucially important.

The third key idea is linked to the second. One characteristic often attributed to organizations is their power to act—a power that is itself diluted within a vague and elusive whole. Immersed in their subjectivity, employees rely on people with whom they interact on a regular basis. The human resource management literature reminds us that the way in which employees behave at work is closely linked to the managerial skills of their immediate supervisors. Depending on their agenda, the latter may or may not act as facilitators in this regard. This is an important point. Immediate supervisors have a significant ability to shape and influence not only work behaviors, but also environmental behaviors. The implications of this point are critically important and will be a recurring theme throughout the book.

Finally, this book is neither an essay nor a handbook. It is not an essay since it does not purport to defend or uphold a particular thesis, and it is not a handbook since no general overview or summary is provided. Rather, my intention is to discuss a set of related issues by examining the greening of workplaces from a range of different perspectives. The more modest aim of this book is to share some ideas and to set out some key questions and thoughts, often in the form of carefully argued positions, but sometimes also proffered as modest propositions designed to arouse curiosity and to encourage debate on environmental issues in organizational contexts. Each issue will be addressed as a standalone chapter. Although they are clearly linked by the same overarching theme, and while references to previous issues discussed will be included at various points throughout the book, the different chapters can be read independently. The book discusses the main theories and related fields surrounding studies on environmental behaviors in workplace settings, the different forms of environmental engagement, their main drivers and obstacles, and the notion of environmental performance. A deliberate decision was made not to offer a literature review on the determinants of environmental behaviors. The reason for this is that a number of excellent overviews and summaries are already available in the literature, making any such attempt here superfluous and unnecessary. Interested readers are referred to the various handbooks published in recent years (Robertson & Barling, 2015; Wells, Gregory-Smith, & Manika, 2018). The book also proposes an original model developed with the aim of understanding how obstacles to the adoption of environmental behaviors operate in practice—specifically, a new integrative model of (non)environmental behaviors based on individual decision-making. The book concludes by examining the links between organizational practices, individual behaviors, and environmental performance.

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