

THE IMPACT OF RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEES' GREEN BEHAVIOR IN VIETNAMESE HOSPITALS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF FELT OBLIGATION FOR CONSTRUCTIVE CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Environmental sustainability has become an increasingly important priority for healthcare organizations, where employees' environmentally responsible behaviors contribute to both organizational performance and public health. Drawing on Social Cognitive Theory, this study investigates the influence of responsible leadership on employees' green behavior in Vietnamese hospitals and examines the mediating role of felt obligation for constructive change. Using a quantitative research approach, the study analyzes the relationships among responsible leadership, felt obligation for constructive change, stakeholder values, and employees' green behavior. The findings indicate that responsible leadership positively promotes employees' green behavior both directly and indirectly through employees' felt obligation for constructive change, confirming its mediating role in the proposed research model. The study extends the responsible leadership literature by explaining the psychological mechanism through which responsible leadership fosters environmentally responsible workplace behaviors. The findings also provide practical implications for hospital administrators seeking to strengthen environmental sustainability by cultivating responsible leadership and encouraging employees' proactive commitment to organizational change.

Keywords: responsible leadership; employee green behavior; felt obligation for constructive change; Social Cognitive Theory; stakeholder values; hospitals.

Introduction

Currently, businesses are facing increasing energy costs and the impacts of changes in natural resources that require sustainable management (Dai & Xu, 2023). Successfully implementing a firm's green and sustainable strategies requires the engagement of employees and the demonstration of green behaviors. Researchers have indicated that employees' green behavior can generate positive outcomes for organizations, such as cost savings, improved work efficiency, and enhanced competitive advantage.

Employee green behavior (EGB) is defined as voluntary and organization-authorized actions performed by employees during work, aimed at conserving natural resources and enhancing the organization's environmental performance (Zhang et al., 2024). EGB encompasses the following behaviors: (1) sustainable work practices (pollution prevention), (2) resource conservation (resource

reuse), (3) influencing others (sharing sustainable development concepts), and (4) proactive initiatives (participating in green campaigns) (Ali & Juan, 2024). These behaviors all relate to employees' responsibility toward environmental sustainability. To better understand how to promote EGB within organizations, previous studies have identified both individual and organizational contextual factors.

Contextual factors, such as leadership style, are critical predictors of green behavior. Traditional leadership styles typically focus on the leader-follower relationship, with the goal of improving employees' work outcomes related to sustainable development. Responsible leadership (RL), however, goes beyond the leader-employee relationship and fosters positive employee responses while emphasizing accountability to the organization, society, and the environment. Responsible leaders consider the natural ecosystem as a key stakeholder and focus on

social sustainability and environmental friendliness to achieve a balance among humans, society, and nature (Hamdani et al., 2024).

Younas et al. (2023) suggest that a shared green vision positively influences responsible leadership, which in turn affects employees' green behavior both in-role and extra-role. Thus, current research on responsible leadership and employee green behavior primarily emphasizes social responsibility and its impact on mechanisms that affect internal and external environmental change within organizations. However, these studies have not clarified the role of employees' psychological perceptions in influencing green behavior. To fill this research gap, this study investigates how a felt obligation for constructive change and stakeholder values act as mechanisms to clarify whether responsible leadership affects employees' green behavior, and to what extent these mechanisms mediate the influence of responsible leadership on employee green behavior.

1. Theoretical Background

Social Cognitive Theory

Based on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1991), the external environment can directly influence an individual's proactive initiatives and subsequently shape their behavior. Social Cognitive Theory provides a framework for understanding how responsible leadership serves as an important external factor that can impact employees' perceptions and voluntary behaviors. Moreover, responsible leaders not only fulfill social responsibilities toward stakeholders but also set an example by focusing on environmental sustainability issues and actively seeking to improve the organization's green practices (de la Fuente et al., 2023).

The leader-employee relationship influences the extent to which employees perceive responsible leadership as a role model, both in terms of work-related aspects and their felt obligation for constructive change. When individuals experience high positive emotions, their display of responsible leadership behaviors also increases, including recognition of employees' values and a willingness to adhere to responsible leadership principles.

Responsible Leadership and Employees' Felt Obligation for Constructive Change

Responsible leadership refers to leadership behavior that achieves trust, collaboration, and mutual stability with various internal and

external stakeholders by actively fulfilling social responsibilities and promoting sustainable development of the organization and the common interests of stakeholders by addressing their demands (Awa et al., 2024).

Based on Social Cognitive Theory, employees gradually internalize the values of responsible leadership through observation and role modeling in daily work. Through this mechanism, employees are inspired to work toward harmony among individuals, the organization, and society. Therefore, responsible leadership can be considered a key condition for promoting employees' green behavior:

H1: Responsible leadership has a positive effect on employee green behavior.

Responsible Leadership and Employees' Felt Obligation for Constructive Change

Responsible leadership emphasizes maintaining a balance between profit, people, and the ecological environment. Consequently, these leaders often demonstrate responsibility through role modeling and actively pursuing change. Additionally, responsible leaders enhance organizational identification by prioritizing employees' autonomy (Maak & Pless, 2006). Social Cognitive Theory provides a solid foundation for the positive correlation between organizational identification and behaviors valued by the organization.

Responsible leaders serve as role models for employees regarding accountability, nurturing pride, fostering a sense of belonging, inspiring hard work, and enhancing job performance (Xiao et al., 2024). Therefore, responsible leadership positively influences employees' felt obligation for constructive change.

H2: Responsible leadership has a positive effect on employees' felt obligation for constructive change.

The Mediating Role of Employees' Felt Obligation for Constructive Change

Employees' felt obligation for constructive change (FRCC) refers to an individual's proactive prioritization of goals, refinement of processes, or modification of established norms. When employees have high job autonomy, they exhibit stronger organizational identification and a greater sense of obligation toward positive change. Employees' perceptions of constructive change reflect their psychological state regarding accountability for

job performance and positively influence employee green behavior (Han et al., 2019). Employees are more likely to demonstrate a felt obligation for constructive change when they perceive their leaders as responsible in the workplace.

Social Cognitive Theory explains the mechanism through which responsible leadership promotes greater engagement in green behavior, which employees subsequently emulate (Parker & Turner, 2002). In other words, when leaders cultivate a strong sense of obligation for constructive change by engaging employees' attention, employees are

more likely to exhibit both constructive change behaviors and green behaviors. Therefore, the relationship between responsible leadership and employee green behavior is mediated by employees' felt obligation for constructive change.

H3: Felt obligation for constructive change has a positive effect on employee green behavior.

H4: Felt obligation for constructive change mediates the relationship between responsible leadership and employee green behavior.

The research model is presented in Figure 1.

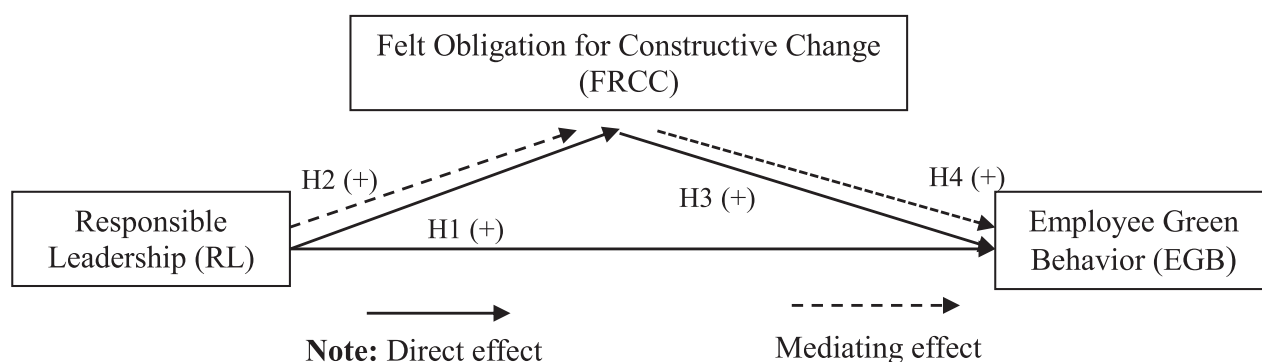


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

2. Research Methodology

Research Procedure

Hospitals in Vietnam play a crucial role in providing healthcare services to the population while creating a clean and green environment to ensure public health. Studying the green behavior of healthcare employees can provide valuable insights for developing green policies in Vietnam. This study primarily focuses on hospitals in Ho Chi Minh City, including both public and private hospitals. The diversity of these hospitals contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of employee green behavior across different contexts.

Data were collected from full-time employees working in hospitals in Vietnam between April and May 2025. With the support of hospital managers, coordinators were assigned to randomly distribute paper surveys to full-time hospital employees.

The data were analyzed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 3.0 software. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its suitability for small sample sizes and its ability to handle non-normal data (Hair et al., 2014). Although PLS-SEM is often recommended

for exploratory studies, it can also be applied in confirmatory research (Hair et al., 2019).

Measurement Scales

The study employed a 5-item scale developed by Voegtlin (2012) to measure responsible leadership. Employee green behavior was measured using a 9-item scale adapted from Mónus (2021). Employees' perception of constructive change was assessed using a 5-item scale developed by Liang et al. (2012).

3. Research Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of healthcare employees participating in the survey are presented in Table 1. The results indicate that the workforce has a relatively high average level of experience, with more than half of the employees having worked between 5 and 10 years. The proportion of employees with over 10 years of experience is relatively low, which may reflect limited promotion opportunities, generational changes in the workforce, or other factors such as retirement or attrition among more experienced staff.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Survey Sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	180	57.1
	Female	135	42.9
Age	< 25	98	31.1
	25-35	90	28.6
	36-45	112	35.6
	> 46	15	4.8
Education Level	Vocational	34	10.8
	College	145	46.0
	Bachelor	280	88.9
	Postgraduate	237	75.2
Job Position	Doctor	80	25.4
	Nurse	112	35.6
	Medical Technician	37	11.7
	Pharmacist	37	11.7
	Other Staff	49	15.6
Tenure	< 5 years	175	55.6
	5-10 years	95	30.2
	> 10 years	45	14.3

(Source: Data Analysis Results, 2025)

To assess the validity and reliability of the measurement scales, the study employed convergent and discriminant validity techniques using the following indicators: Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Variance Inflation Factor (VIF),

Composite Reliability (CR), and Cronbach’s alpha. The results presented in Table 2 show that all indicators meet the statistical criteria recommended by Hair et al. (2019).

Table 2. Reliability and Convergent Validity Values

Construct	Items	VIF	AVE	Cronbach’s α	CR
Responsible Leadership (RL)	5	1.91-2.20	0.668	0.876	0.879
Felt Obligation for Constructive Change (FRCC)	5	1.93-2.21	0.673	0.876	0.879
Employee Green Behavior (EGB)	13	1.87-2.36	0.618	0.923	0.924

(Source: Data Analysis Results, 2025)

The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio was used to assess discriminant validity. The results indicate that all construct pair values are below

0.85, suggesting that the constructs demonstrate adequate discriminant validity (Table 3).

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratios

Construct	EGB	RL	FRCC
EGB	-		
RL	0.619	-	
FRCC	0.437	0.332	-

(Source: Data Analysis Results, 2025)

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach was used to examine the relationships among the constructs in the model. The Smart Partial Least Squares (SmartPLS) method tested the relationships between latent variables. This method provides information on how the conceptual model predicts the hypothesized relationships. The bootstrapping method (500 resamples) was employed to calculate standard errors and t-statistics to estimate the significance of the path

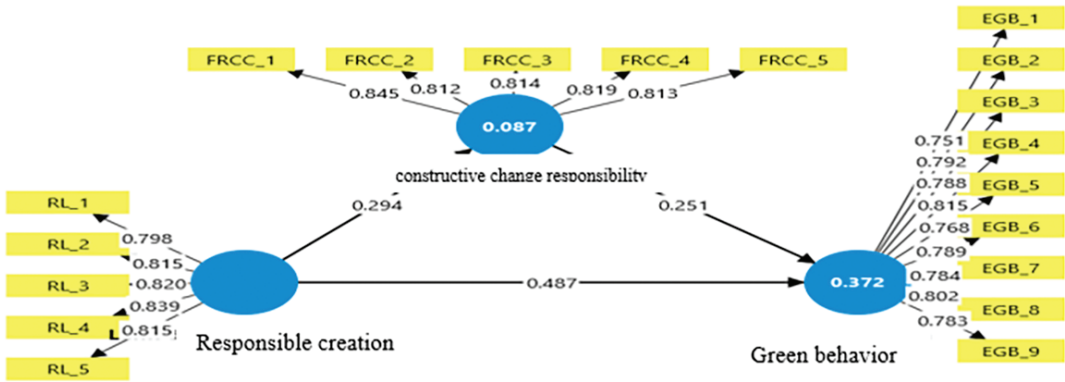
coefficients for each construct. T-statistics greater than 1.6, 1.96, or 2.58 indicate significance at alpha levels of 0.10, 0.05, and 0.01, respectively. The model output, including path coefficients and p-values for dependent constructs, was analyzed to test the hypotheses.

The results in Table 4 indicate that responsible leadership has a significant positive effect on employee green behavior ($\beta = 0.560$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H1. Responsible leadership also has a positive effect on employees' felt obligation for constructive change ($\beta = 0.294$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H2. Felt obligation for constructive change positively affects employee green behavior ($\beta = 0.251$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H3. Figure 2 presents the results of the model testing, showing that all paths in the research model are positive and statistically significant.

Table 4. Structural Model Testing Results

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Decision
RL -> EGB	0.560	0.563	0.039	14.291	0.000	Accept
RL -> FRCC	0.294	0.299	0.048	6.131	0.000	Accept
FRCC -> EGB	0.251	0.253	0.053	4.697	0.000	Accept

(Source: Data analysis results, 2025)



(Source: Data analysis results, 2025)

Figure 2. Results of the Model Testing

The mediation test was conducted using SmartPLS 4.0. Following the bootstrap method by Hair et al. (2019), and the reporting of results refers to the reporting approach of Cole et al. The results in Table 5 present the analysis of the effect of FRCC as a mediator between RL and EGB, which

is statistically significant. These results indicate the presence of a mediating effect, showing that responsible leadership can not only directly predict employees' green behavior but also indirectly through the mediating role of FRCC. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is accepted.

Table 5. Results of the Mediation Effect Test

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
RL -> FRCC-> EGB	0.074	0.075	0.020	3.655	0.000

(Source: Data analysis results, 2025)

4. Managerial Implications

Based on the findings regarding the positive role of responsible leadership and the mediating role of constructive change responsibility, the study proposes the following managerial implications:

First, fully leverage the catalytic role of leadership and strengthen the training and selection of responsible leaders. By studying the mechanisms through which responsible leadership affects employees’ green behavior, organizations in practice should pay more attention to responsible leadership and foster talent development to cultivate and reinforce responsive leadership styles.

Second, organizations should establish appropriate standards for recruitment, post-promotion mechanisms, and employee screening to identify individuals with responsible leadership qualities, especially values related to stakeholder engagement, within the management team. They should develop relevant training programs and leadership development initiatives that emphasize shaping and fostering stakeholder-related values, stimulating the demand for green behavior, and nurturing responsible leaders through training.

Third, organizations should aim to establish and nurture green environmental protection teams. Managers should focus on encouraging employees more actively in the workplace and organizing activities centered around green development or sustainable development themes.

Conclusion

Based on the Vietnamese context, this paper discusses previous studies related to employees’ green behavior, with a particular focus on the healthcare sector. This study makes three significant contributions to the research field on leadership styles and employees’ green behavior.

First, the study responds to prior scholars’ calls to examine how responsible leadership influences employees’ green behavior (He et al.,

2021; Zhang et al., 2021). The findings reinforce the social cognitive theory by providing evidence that responsible leadership can generate positive impacts on employees’ green behavior.

Second, this study confirms the mechanism through which responsible leadership affects employees’ green behavior by examining the mediating effects of constructive change responsibility. Existing literature has shown that current research on responsible leadership’s influence on employees’ green behavior primarily focuses on social responsibility and the effects of mechanisms reflecting changes in the internal and external organizational environment, with little attention given to the impact of employees’ psychological perceptions on green behavior. To bridge this gap, our study identifies constructive change responsibility as a potential mediator linking responsible leadership to employees’ green behavior. The findings indicate that employees tend to adopt the values emphasized by responsible leaders, leading to higher environmental responsibility and stronger tendencies toward green behavior (Ahmed et al., 2024). Consequently, this study provides valuable insights into why some employees exhibit greener behavior and highlights how responsible leaders can facilitate this by influencing employees’ perceptions of sustainable practices.

Third, this study introduces an exploratory approach to promoting employees’ green behavior by considering the mediating role of constructive change responsibility. This finding emphasizes the importance of raising employees’ environmental awareness, aligning with previous studies that indicate some employees may have resistance to green behavior. Therefore, to promote sustainable development and maintain a balance between individuals, organizations, society, and nature, responsible leaders must act as role models.

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