

Leadership for the Green Generation

Transformational leaders can have an outsized impact on the pro-environment behaviours of those around them. The leaders of Steam Whistle Brewing show how it's done

By Jennifer L. Robertson and Julian Barling

About the authors

Jennifer L. Robertson is an assistant professor in the DAN Management and Organizational Studies program at Western University. Jennifer's research focuses on psychological issues involved in organizational environmental sustainability and on the nature and prediction of leadership. Her research has been published in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior and Leadership Quarterly*.

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QSB Insight

ABOUT A DECADE AGO, (CO-AUTHOR) JULIAN BARLING and his colleagues introduced the notion of safety-specific transformational leadership, which refers to leadership that is characterized by the four components of transformational leadership but is targeted at influencing positive safety practices. (“Transformational” leaders act as positive role models, are inspiring, encourage others to be inquisitive and develop solutions, and show empathy for an employee’s well-being and development.)

Subsequently, they and others have shown that target-specific transformational leadership — in which behaviours that are expressed focus on influencing a specific outcome — is an important predictor of specific targeted behaviours. Extending the focus of target-specific transformational leadership, we recently proposed environmentally-specific transformational leadership, and defined it as “a manifestation of transformational leadership in which the content of the leadership behaviours is all focused on encouraging pro-environmental initiatives.” In doing so, we suggest that through the enactment of the four transformational leadership behaviours, environmentally-specific transformational leaders use their relationship with subordinates to intentionally influence and encourage their subordinates to engage in workplace pro-environmental behaviours.

In manifesting idealized influence, environmentally-specific transformational leaders are guided by and demonstrate a moral commitment to an environmentally sustainable planet (the collective good), by encouraging and enacting behaviours that will benefit the natural environment. By doing so, environmentally-specific transformational leaders become role models for subordinates, who are then more likely to engage in these behaviours themselves. Leaders high in inspirational motivation encourage their employees through their own passion and optimism to overcome psychological setbacks and external obstacles, and to go beyond what is good for themselves by engaging in behaviours that benefit the natural environment. Intellectually stimulating leaders remain open to subordinates’ ideas to improve the organizations’ environmental performance. They encourage subordinates to think about environmental issues for themselves, question long-held assumptions about their own and their organization’s environmental

The Psychology of Green Organizations

This white paper is adapted from *The Psychology of Green Organizations*, edited by Jennifer L. Robertson and Julian Barling (Oxford University Press, 2015). Purchase the book and get a 30 percent discount by using the code AMPROMD9 at checkout.

practices, and address environmental problems in an innovative manner. Finally, leaders who exhibit individualized consideration establish close relationships with followers within which they can transmit their environmental values, model their environmental behaviours, and raise questions about environmental assumptions and priorities. In short, environmentally-specific transformational leaders are driven by their own values to engage in these behaviours to enhance their organizations' environmental performance through their influence on subordinates. Recent research has shown that they are successful in this endeavour.

Based on a sample of leader-subordinate pairs working in different organizations in the U.S. and Canada, we showed that environmentally-specific transformational leadership indirectly influences subordinates' workplace pro-environmental behaviours, by first evoking employees' passion for the environment. In addition, it was not only formal leadership behaviours that influenced subordinates' pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. Providing some support for a modeling effect, leaders' own behaviours influenced their subordinates' behaviours. Specifically, leaders' workplace pro-environmental behaviours directly and indirectly (through employees' environmental passion) predicted subordinates' pro-environmental behaviours.

Confidence in these findings is enhanced, as similar effects have emerged in research with Chinese leaders. Graves, Sarkis, and Zhu reported that Chinese employees' rating of their managers' environmentally-specific transformational leadership both directly and indirectly (through employees' autonomous motivation) influenced their own workplace pro-environmental behaviours. Extending the way in which environmentally-specific transformational leadership exerts any effects, Graves et al also demonstrated that employees' external motivation and workplace pro-environmental behaviours were positively correlated when environmentally-specific transformational leadership was high, but negatively correlated when environmentally-specific transformational leadership was low.

Environmental Leadership at Steam Whistle Brewing

Although there are numerous case examples of environmental leaders and environmental leadership, we focus on one example here, namely, environmental leadership at Steam Whistle Brewing. Steam Whistle Brewing is a fitting example of environmentally-specific transformational leadership behaviours enacted by members of the management team in a private sector organization.

Steam Whistle Brewing is a craft brewery located in Toronto, Canada, that was founded in 1998 by three friends, Greg Taylor, Cam Heaps, and Greg Cromwell. The company focuses on making one beer, a premium Pilsner that is brewed from all-natural, GMO-free ingredients. Steam Whistle Brewing's beer is packaged in custom-made green glass bottles comprising 30 percent more glass than other beer bottles on the market, making it reusable approximately 45 to 50 times. The company produces an average of 110,000 bottles of beer a day, which are sold across four Canadian provinces, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia. Steam Whistle Brewing has received numerous accolades for its beer, business success, contributions to communities, and environmental performance. As well, Steam Whistle Brewing has been recognized as one of Canada's Clean 50 Companies and one of Canada's Greenest Employers.

The success of Steam Whistle's environmental initiatives can be attributed largely to the environmental leadership provided by its co-owners, Greg Taylor and Cam Heaps, and its director of communications, Sybil Taylor (wife of co-founder, Greg Taylor, and the brewery's first employee), all of whom embody the four behaviours associated with environmentally-specific transformational leadership. First, the co-founders display idealized influence by strongly believing in doing the right thing, which extends to include doing what is right for the natural environment. For example, the co-founders' decisions to implement various environmental initiatives at the operations level (such as using GMO-free ingredients and renewable electricity, painting labels on bottles to save trees and eliminate waste, and supporting sustainable organizations and events) demonstrate their commitment to environmental sustainability. This, in turn, enables the co-founders to

act as role models whose support for environmental initiatives can be emulated by all employees. Recently, the co-founders have acted as environmental role models by approving funds to be spent on the implementation of showers, bike racks, and a public bike maintenance station, in an effort to encourage employees' to travel to and from work in an environmentally sustainable manner.

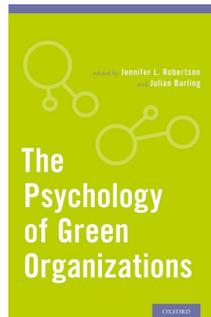
Second, in terms of inspirational motivation, Steam Whistle Brewing's top management team influences its employees by communicating to employees' their vision of the environmental practices they wish to implement, showing support for these practices, and encouraging employees to help develop and carry out these practices. This influences employees to go out on their own and suggest further ideas for environmentally-sustainable practices. For example, one of the co-founders told the company's electrical engineer that management wanted to audit the amount of electricity being used in an attempt to conserve the organization's energy use. This initial communication about and support for conservation practices motivated the engineer to go further and develop his own energy conservation practice that included the installation of motion sensors in low-traffic areas of the organization.

The co-founders also influence their employees through the company's environmental committee. Feedback and information are given to managers about areas in which the company can improve its environmental performance, and all staff are trained in environmentally friendly work practices. By doing so, this committee, founded by Sybil Traylor, displays confidence and optimism that each employee can go beyond what is good for themselves by working in an environmentally responsible manner.

Third, the co-founders engage in intellectual stimulation by giving employees the opportunity to question the company's current practices, and being open to staff ideas as to how the company can change their practices to be more environmentally friendly. Moreover, the management team at Steam Whistle Brewing deliberately creates an atmosphere that encourages and rewards creativity, which extends to the ways in which employees think about environmental sustainability. As one example, co-founder Greg Taylor noted during an [interview with Business News Network](#) that many of Steam Whistle's environmental practices originate from

employees' innovative ideas that are communicated upward to the co-founders, who then implemented them.

Finally, by encouraging dialogue with employees, listening to individual employees' ideas, acting upon these ideas immediately, training employees to work in a more environmentally friendly manner, retaining a close-knit family atmosphere, creating a flat organizational structure, and practicing "management by walking around", Steam Whistle's management develops close relationships with employees through which they can further transmit their environmental values and model their environmental behaviours. Perhaps more importantly, it is within the trusting relationship that the co-founders' values and beliefs and the challenges they raise about environmental assumptions and priorities are most likely to be accepted. In sum, by invoking the behaviours associated with environmentally-specific transformational leadership, the management team at Steam Whistle Brewing has meaningfully influenced their company's environmental performance.



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