

Green leadership: a scientific paradigm or a managerial fashion?

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Abstract

Purpose – This study critically explores the increasingly popular concept of green leadership within managerial and academic discourse. Although frequently presented as an ethically grounded leadership model aligned with sustainability goals, its maturity as a scientific paradigm remains questionable. The paper evaluates whether green leadership possesses the conceptual coherence, methodological structure, and problem-solving capacity necessary to qualify as a paradigm.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on Thomas Kuhn’s theory of paradigms, the study examines the conceptual foundations of green leadership and assesses its theoretical and methodological status. It further incorporates insights from Abrahamson’s concept of management fashion and employs a critical management studies lens to explore the discursive construction of green leadership. Additionally, the analysis integrates Popper’s falsifiability criterion and Lakatos’s research programme model to evaluate the concept’s scientific rigor.

Findings – The analysis suggests that green leadership largely draws on transformational, ethical, and sustainable leadership approaches without offering an original theoretical foundation. From this perspective, it resembles a management fashion more than a paradigmatic framework. The study argues that the normative positivity surrounding green leadership may contribute to legitimizing existing organizational power structures. Furthermore, it identifies Western-centric development and universalist assumptions that challenge the concept’s cultural adaptability in non-Western or developing contexts. Overall, the findings conclude that green leadership currently lacks sufficient explanatory power, conceptual coherence, and theoretical maturity to be considered a scientific paradigm.

Originality/value – This study contributes by systematically evaluating green leadership through the lens of paradigm theory and the philosophy of science. It moves beyond normative and symbolic representations of green leadership and provides a critical and interdisciplinary perspective that highlights its conceptual limitations and cultural blind spots. The study emphasizes the need for further theoretically grounded, empirically robust, and culturally sensitive research to enhance the legitimacy and practical relevance of green leadership.

Keywords Green leadership, Management fashion, Discourse analysis,
Science philosophy critical management studies

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

In recent years, the growing global emphasis on environmental sustainability has redefined the corporate understanding of social responsibility and led to the emergence of new concepts in managerial discourse (Wassmer *et al.*, 2014; Hasanuddin *et al.*, 2024; Najmaei and Sadeghinejad, 2023). One such concept is green leadership, used to describe leadership styles that are environmentally conscious, sustainability-oriented, and ecologically aware (Daud *et al.*, 2023; Hussain *et al.*, 2025). The term began appearing in the literature in the early 2000s, primarily to describe environmentally responsible leadership behaviors. It quickly gained traction by being associated with transformational leadership, ethical leadership, and



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sustainable management approaches, becoming a frequently referenced notion in both academic discourse and organizational practices (Robertson and Barling, 2013; Graves and Sarkis, 2018; Turan Torun, 2023). In this context, “organizational practice” refers to concrete managerial practices through which environmental concerns are operationalized within organizations, including strategic decisions, formal policies, performance systems, and daily behavioral routines (Feldman and Pentland, 2003; Whittington, 2006). These practices may include sustainability-oriented goal setting, environmental performance measurement, green human resource initiatives, and symbolic communication strategies that are related to environmental responsibility.

However, the scientific legitimacy and theoretical coherence of the concept remain subject to debate (Aycan *et al.*, 2025). Its inconsistent definitions, frequent use without a clear theoretical foundation, and entanglement with normative discourse have raised questions about its academic validity (Boiral *et al.*, 2014). Green leadership is often employed as a component of sustainability policies or as a tool for marketing and corporate image-building, yet these uses frequently lack a substantive leadership framework (Rizal *et al.*, 2024). This raises a critical question: is green leadership a meaningful contribution to leadership literature, or merely a “managerial fashion” shaped by popular discourse?

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the conceptual foundations, development, and practical applications of green leadership to evaluate whether it is scientifically grounded. To this end, the study first discusses the definitions and origins of the concept in the literature, then analyzes the theoretical frameworks with which it is associated. Finally, it assesses whether the concept is overloaded with normative discourse and to what extent it maintains scientific consistency. The central question guiding the study is: “Is the concept of green leadership born out of a genuine theoretical need, or is it a fashionable construct imposed by environmental management discourse?”

This analysis is conducted through a qualitative literature review and critical theoretical interpretation. Conceptual assessments draw on interdisciplinary perspectives and critical management studies. Rather than outright rejecting the notion of green leadership, the study argues for a balanced approach that acknowledges both its potential and its limitations. Green leadership may offer a valuable framework for ethically driven leadership practices centered on environmental sustainability, but this potential will only be realized through sufficient theoretical maturation and methodological coherence (Chen and Chang, 2013).

In this respect, the study challenges the normative assumptions prevalent in the green leadership literature and aims to contribute theoretically to clarifying the concept’s scientific status. Thus, this article takes a simultaneously critical and constructive approach, offering insights into how the scientific status of green leadership might be strengthened.

Research strategy

This study adopts a critical and interpretive literature review approach rather than a complete systematic literature review. The purpose of the paper is not to analyze publications in a quantitative manner but to critically evaluate the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the green leadership concept in the context of leadership literature and the philosophy of science.

Literature review was conducted on major academic databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The keywords in different combinations include “green leadership”, “environmental leadership”, “management fashion”, “paradigm theory”, “Kuhn”, “Popper”, “Lakatos”, and “critical management studies.”

In review process, it was mainly focused on basic studies that were published between 2000–2025 that shape the field’s theoretical development. The classic and foundational studies in leadership theory and philosophy of science were included in review to ensure theoretical coherence.

The inclusion criteria were defined as follows: (1) discussing green leadership and related concepts clearly, (2) providing theoretical and empirical contributions to leadership theory,

and (3) adopting a theoretical framework that enables evaluation of the scientific paradigm. However, practice-focused publications that are merely descriptive and do not have a theoretical basis were excluded.

This review aims to prioritize studies that are theoretically significant and conceptually explanatory. This interpretive perspective provides a methodological framework that is suitable for evaluating whether green leadership has the characteristics of a scientific paradigm.

The theoretical foundations of green leadership

The concept of green leadership refers to a leader's conscious efforts to make environmental sustainability an organizational priority. In this study, leadership is understood not merely as a formal authority position or personal trait, but as a relational and socially constructed process that is exercised through influencing organizational contexts (Crevani *et al.*, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006). In this sense, leadership shapes norms, behaviors, decision-making processes, and strategic orientations. This conceptualization enables leadership to be analyzed as both a set of observable behaviors and a discursive mechanism that is embedded in broader cultural and institutional systems (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010).

In the literature, green leadership is most commonly associated with transformational leadership, ethical leadership, and sustainable leadership theories—sometimes positioned as a derivative of these models, and at other times as an environmentally oriented interpretation of them (Graves and Sarkis, 2018; Mittal and Dhar, 2016; Wahba *et al.*, 2024). The frequent linkage between green leadership and these established theories suggests that it has emerged not as an original theory, but rather as an ecological extension of existing leadership paradigms. However, the concept's flexible and often inconsistent definitions across multiple contexts raise significant concerns about its theoretical coherence and scientific explanatory power.

On the other hand, several recent empirical studies indicate that green leadership can be effective in enhancing employees' environmental motivation and improving corporate environmental performance (Chen and Chang, 2013; Zhang *et al.*, 2020). While these findings are valuable in demonstrating the concept's practical relevance, they do not constitute direct evidence of its theoretical robustness. In the absence of strong theoretical foundations, such applied successes risk positioning green leadership more as a strategic managerial tool than as a bona fide leadership theory.

Transformational leadership theory emphasizes the leader's visionary role in fostering organizational change and employee development (Bass, 1985). Green leadership is often explained through the lens of visionary leadership behaviors that drive environmental transformation (Robertson and Barling, 2013). However, a critical issue here is that environmental concerns were not central to the original formulation of transformational leadership. As such, the association between green and transformational leadership typically remains a contextual expansion, giving the impression of conceptual derivation rather than theoretical originality (Graves and Sarkis, 2018; Zhang *et al.*, 2020).

Similarly, ethical leadership theory is frequently cited as a foundation for green leadership. The core premise of ethical leadership is that the leader serves as a moral guide, both personally and for followers (Brown and Treviño, 2006). In the green leadership literature, this idea is linked to environmentally responsible behaviors, positioning the leader's ecological sensitivity as a moral obligation (Boiral *et al.*, 2014; Choi *et al.*, 2016). However, this interpretation runs the risk of reducing ethical leadership to an environmentally driven normative framework. While it expands the scope of ethical leadership, it does not significantly contribute to the development of a distinct theoretical foundation for green leadership (Brown and Treviño, 2006; Boiral *et al.*, 2014).

With a closer look at ethical leadership theory, we can see that this approach already relies on a developed normative and moral framework. Ethical leadership is not merely described as

rule-based behavior, but as exhibiting normatively appropriate behaviors through the leader's individual actions, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making processes (Brown and Treviño, 2006). Within this framework, leaders are expected not merely to adopt moral standards but also to actively shape the ethical climate.

From this perspective, environmental responsibility can be interpreted as a specific area within a broader ethical responsibility framework, not as a separate and independent leadership paradigm. If sustainability concerns are integrated into leadership primarily via a moral obligation, green leadership has a risk of functioning as a thematic specialization of ethical leadership. Hence, ethical leadership theory already includes the elements that are at the center of sustainability discussions, such as long-term responsibility, stakeholder orientation, and societal impact (Brown and Treviño, 2006; Choi *et al.*, 2016). This conceptual overlap revives questions related to the theoretical novelty of green leadership.

Besides, it would be a reductionist approach to conclude that green leadership has totally melted down into ethical leadership. The “environmental” qualifier can bring out a more explicit normative emphasis that prioritizes ecological boundaries and intergenerational responsibility. However, specific mechanisms, boundary conditions, or explanatory propositions are needed. Without putting forward this kind of divergence, the relationship between green leadership and ethical leadership seems more like a mutual theoretical dependency rather than a paradigmatic distinction.

Another prominent theoretical approach in the background of green leadership is sustainable leadership, which encompasses a long-term leadership vision attentive to social, economic, and environmental balance (Hargreaves and Fink, 2004). Green leadership is often seen as the environmental component of sustainable leadership. However, sustainable leadership presents a multidimensional structure that integrates these three dimensions simultaneously (Hargreaves and Fink, 2004; Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011). In contrast, green leadership is typically limited to environmental concerns, thereby appearing as a narrower subcategory. This narrow focus suggests thematic fragmentation rather than theoretical coherence, weakening the concept's originality (Avery and Bergsteiner, 2011).

In summary, the theoretical groundwork for green leadership largely stems from ecological reinterpretations of pre-existing leadership theories. This reliance distances the concept from being an original, coherent, and independent theoretical framework (Boiral *et al.*, 2014). Its weak theoretical integrity increases the risk of it becoming a normative and popular discourse rather than an academically rigorous explanatory tool (Graves and Sarkis, 2018). Moreover, the fact that much of the theoretical development around green leadership has been driven by a need to explain empirical findings suggests an inductive rather than deductive trajectory. This inductive orientation limits the conceptual depth of green leadership and positions it as supplementary rather than foundational within leadership theory.

Despite these critical observations, the concept of green leadership should not be dismissed outright, as it holds transformative potential in organizational contexts. In today's management environment, where environmental sustainability is increasingly regarded as a strategic priority (Hussain, 2023), green leadership can serve as a guiding framework for shaping employee behavior, fostering an environmentally conscious organizational culture, and enhancing corporate environmental performance (Khan *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, rather than being rejected, the concept should be restructured by strengthening its theoretical foundations and articulating its unique parameters. Such reconstruction may allow the concept to be addressed in a more consistent manner from both scientific and practical perspectives.

Nevertheless, the disconnect between theoretical interpretations and empirical findings within the green leadership literature remains a challenge (Dopson *et al.*, 2019). The lack of methodological coherence makes it difficult to generate a comprehensive understanding of how the concept translates into organizational practice. Many studies remain descriptive rather than explanatory and fail to adequately explore the causal relationships between leadership behaviors and environmental outcomes (Sachdeva and Singh, 2023). As such, there is a clear need for interdisciplinary research and empirical designs that align theory with method. Future

studies should aim to develop valid and reliable instruments for measuring green leadership behaviors, as doing so would help address methodological gaps and reinforce the theoretical rigor of the field.

A discursive trend or a scientifically grounded concept?

Green leadership has attracted growing interest in recent years, both in academic literature and in organizational practice, often presented as a paradigm that highlights the role of leaders in promoting environmentally friendly practices (Javed *et al.*, 2024). However, its rapid rise in popularity seems to be driven more by its normative appeal and managerial utility than by its scientific depth. This raises the question: does green leadership rest on a solid theoretical foundation supported by scientific inquiry, or is it merely a transient “fashion concept” shaped by popular management discourse (Abrahamson, 1996)? As Abrahamson (1996) notes, management fashions often spread through temporary appeal, but their lasting impact depends on their ability to withstand critical scrutiny.

A review of recent trends in the literature shows that the term green leadership began to gain noticeable attention especially after 2010, and it has since been the subject of numerous articles in international journals (Aycan *et al.*, 2025). However, the majority of these publications focus on defining the concept and exploring its organizational impacts, with relatively few addressing its theoretical originality. This indicates that the concept still lacks theoretical consolidation. Moreover, the acceleration of sustainability-themed research under increasing academic incentives and publication pressure may have contributed to its rapid diffusion (Iqbal *et al.*, 2020).

Management discourse often includes what are known as “fashion concepts”—ideas that respond not to scientific rigor but to current organizational demands, market pressures, or normative expectations (Benders and Van Veen, 2001). Green leadership frequently exhibits the typical characteristics of such management fashions: broadly defined yet vague, rapidly disseminated, widely adopted in consulting practices, but with limited theoretical development. A large proportion of studies on green leadership focus more on its application and impact on organizational performance than on clarifying its theoretical underpinnings (Graves and Sarkis, 2018; Mittal and Dhar, 2016). This trend reflects an emphasis on practical guidance rather than scientific theory-building. As a result, much of the discourse on green leadership reproduces a set of recurring normative tropes centered around sustainability rhetoric.

In green leadership discussions, the focus is generally on the leadership dimension, and the “green” qualifier is not questioned adequately. However, the “green” concept is not just an ethical choice that represents environmentally responsible behaviors but also provides a framework that potentially questions the basic assumptions of modern management rationality. In particular, established assumptions such as considering profit maximization as the primary aim of business, a management approach based on short-term performance indicators, and shareholder primacy are in tension with the sustainability perspective. From this perspective, a “green approach” may require reconsidering organizations not just at the behavioural level but also at the structural level. Elements such as ecological boundaries, resource scarcity, and intergenerational responsibility are normative and material facts that limit growth-oriented logic. This situation brings about a more comprehensive governance mentality within the framework of stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984). If the “green” concept is considered from this strong perspective, the issue becomes redefining organizational goals and performance criteria rather than merely enriching leadership style with environmental responsiveness.

However, a good part of the current green leadership literature does not examine this structural transformation adequately. Many studies integrate environmental sensitivity into current managerial frameworks but do not question the underlying economic assumptions critically. Hence, a gap has occurred between the potential paradigmatic power of the “green”

concept and its usage in the literature. Although the green leadership narrative implies a transformative capacity, in practice it is considered within the boundaries of the current management paradigm.

The discursive nature of the concept also deserves attention. Green leadership is frequently linked to positively charged terms such as “responsible leadership,” “moral leadership,” or “environmentally conscious leadership” (Fry and Egel, 2021). This rhetorical framing tends to place the concept within an ethically untouchable space, making it more difficult to subject to critical inquiry. When a concept is commonly approached with assumptions like “leaders ought to be environmentally responsible,” it risks becoming a normative ideal rather than an explanatory scientific construct (Boiral *et al.*, 2014).

At the organizational level, green leadership can also be instrumentalized to legitimize “greenwashing” practices. Leaders’ environmentally friendly rhetoric may obscure harmful corporate behaviors, thereby transforming leadership discourse into a tool for rhetorical legitimacy. This dynamic weakens the scientific integrity of the concept and suggests that green leadership may be used for strategic rather than ethical purposes (Delmas and Burbano, 2011).

That said, none of these critiques imply that the concept is inherently without value. Green leadership can serve as a meaningful normative framework for embedding pro-environmental behaviors into organizational culture and for fostering environmental awareness at the corporate level (Ng and Burke, 2010; Amoako *et al.*, 2025). Therefore, while the concept must remain open to criticism, it also holds potential to contribute to the human resource dimension of strategic sustainability policies.

Ultimately, green leadership has gained appeal in tandem with the rise of sustainability discourse in the corporate world. However, this appeal has often been discursive rather than scientific. Although the concept has spread rapidly and been addressed in numerous academic studies, it continues to lack theoretical depth and conceptual coherence. These characteristics align it more closely with the profile of a management fashion. For green leadership to earn a stable place within the scientific field, it cannot rely solely on ethical associations or normative appeal. Instead, what is needed is a foundation built on critical, theoretical, and empirically grounded research.

Green leadership through the lens of Thomas Kuhn’s paradigm theory: a scientific revolution or a pre-paradigm?

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn (1962) argues that scientific progress does not occur through linear accumulation of knowledge, but through periodic shifts in paradigms. According to Kuhn, a paradigm is a shared set of beliefs, values, and methodologies that guide how scientists perceive the world, interpret data, and determine what constitutes a legitimate scientific problem. A paradigm is not merely a conceptual framework; it also forms the common language, problem orientation, and methodological consensus within a scientific community. Viewed through this lens, the concept of green leadership falls short of constituting a fully established scientific paradigm as defined by Kuhn, due to several critical reasons outlined below:

(1) Lack of a Shared Research Culture Within the Scientific Community

One of Kuhn’s primary criteria for a paradigm is the presence of commonly accepted norms and methodologies within a scientific community. However, research on green leadership remains scattered, often conducted across diverse theoretical backgrounds and disciplinary boundaries. For instance, some studies explain the concept through the lens of transformational leadership (Robertson and Barling, 2013), while others approach it from ethical leadership (Boiral *et al.*, 2014) or sustainability perspectives (Graves and Sarkis, 2018). This diversity suggests that green leadership is still in a pre-paradigmatic stage, lacking the institutional coherence of “normal science.”

(2) **Absence of Clear Conceptual and Methodological Boundaries**

Kuhn posits that a mature paradigm should clearly define what should be studied, which questions are appropriate to ask, and which methods should be used. In green leadership research, such clarity is absent. The literature contains both qualitative and quantitative studies, analyzing the concept at individual and organizational levels. There is also no consensus on the definition of the term itself. This lack of methodological and conceptual unity places green leadership outside the bounds of Kuhn's paradigm model.

(3) **Inability to Generate Predictive and Explanatory Power**

A paradigm, according to Kuhn, must not only offer explanations but also generate predictions about future phenomena. Most studies on green leadership, however, remain descriptive and explanatory in nature. The concept is often presented with intuitive and normative claims, such as "organizations with high levels of green leadership tend to have better environmental performance." These claims are rarely tested empirically and are insufficiently supported by generalizable theoretical models, limiting the scientific explanatory power of the concept.

(4) **Lack of a Scientific Crisis to Trigger a Paradigm Shift**

Kuhn argues that paradigms emerge in response to crises, where existing theories fail to adequately explain phenomena. In the field of leadership studies, there is no evidence of a crisis stemming from a lack of environmental awareness. Green leadership has emerged not as a revolutionary response, but as an attempt to extend existing theories with an environmental focus. In this sense, it represents a derivative conceptualization rather than a paradigmatic breakthrough.

However, it is important to make a nuanced distinction here. Kuhn's theory is not solely about replacing old frameworks with new ones; it also emphasizes the formation of shared norms and methods within scientific communities. From this angle, while green leadership has not yet fostered a "normal science" domain, it may represent an early theoretical clustering that has the potential to evolve into a paradigm. Such evolution would require empirical support and methodological convergence (Firinci Orman, 2016).

In conclusion, green leadership has not yet established itself as a mature scientific paradigm in the Kuhnian sense. Instead, it resides at a pre-paradigmatic stage, shaped by discourse and influenced by a blend of existing leadership theories. The concept primarily aims to respond to practical organizational needs. To achieve paradigm status, green leadership must articulate a clear theoretical framework, define its conceptual boundaries, and enhance its explanatory and predictive capabilities. Most critically, it must foster methodological alignment within the scholarly community. Without such developments, green leadership is likely to remain a temporary managerial trend rather than a scientific revolution.

A critical perspective on green leadership: a concept caught between discourse, culture, and scientific legitimacy

The question of whether green leadership constitutes a scientific paradigm is not solely a matter of theoretical grounding. It also involves examining how the concept is discursively constructed, how it is positioned within cultural frameworks, and how it functions within the broader production of scientific knowledge. Thus, the concept must be approached from a wider perspective—not only as a type of leadership, but also as a management discourse, a cultural transmission mechanism, and a scientific claim.

In particular, the leadership values and environmental norms of different cultures complicate the universal acceptance of green leadership discourse. For example, in China, green leadership is often aligned with collective values and state-driven environmental policies (Yang *et al.*, 2024), whereas in Africa it tends to be associated with community-based

ecological traditions, diverging from Western individualistic leadership models (Mangaliso, 2001). These contextual differences demand a cultural rethinking of the concept.

This multidimensional nature indicates that green leadership is still far from constituting a scientific paradigm in Kuhnian terms (Kuhn, 1962). Rather, the concept reflects a normative orientation supported by ideological, ethical, and managerial discourses.

Discourse-analytic approaches focus less on the substantive content of green leadership and more on its representational forms—how it is framed and what values it circulates. Phrases such as “environmentally conscious leader” or “responsible manager” automatically attach a positive connotation to the concept and generate a discursive hegemony that suppresses critical reflection. Such concepts produce leader profiles that are normatively idealized but empirically unmeasurable, thereby narrowing the scope for scientific debate (Fairclough, 1995). As a result, green leadership gains more visibility through its rhetorical appeal than through conceptual clarity.

Critical management studies suggest that while the concept appears to pursue ethical goals, it may in fact serve as a new form of power. From this viewpoint, green leadership operates as a normative mechanism that regulates employee behavior through environmental discourse, thereby producing a “green” version of organizational control (Banerjee, 2011). In this sense, the concept may also represent a reconfiguration of institutional compliance under the banner of corporate social responsibility.

Additionally, the Western-centric origins of the green leadership discourse deserve critical attention. The concept has been largely shaped within North American and European contexts, often failing to reflect the institutional realities of developing countries. Yet, for green leadership to function as a global paradigm, it must incorporate diverse cultural leadership norms, environmental perceptions, and organizational priorities (Hofstede, 2001). Without this inclusivity, the concept risks becoming an ideological import—global in aspiration but disconnected from local contexts.

From the perspective of the philosophy of science, green leadership provides limited scientific structure according to Popper’s (2005) criterion of falsifiability. The concept is often built on confirmatory examples and framed with circular propositions such as “green leadership leads to more pro-environmental behavior.” According to Lakatos’s (1970) research program model, green leadership appears to be situated within a protective theoretical belt, yet it has not demonstrated the capacity to generate a progressive research program. As such, it currently exhibits characteristics of a degenerative program.

Taken together, these layered critiques reveal how green leadership is shaped and constrained by discursive, cultural, and epistemological forces beyond its theoretical basis. From this comprehensive vantage point, it becomes evident that the concept has not yet reached the maturity of a scientific paradigm. Instead, it occupies a conceptual space at the intersection of various discourses—a normatively attractive yet scientifically limited construct.

Conclusion and implications

This study has sought to explore the concept of green leadership from a multidimensional perspective—assessing not only its theoretical foundations, but also its discursive construction, cultural context, and scientific legitimacy. It examined the concept’s connections to transformational, ethical, and sustainable leadership approaches, concluding that green leadership is more a derivative extension of these theories than a standalone theoretical framework. While existing theories have been reinterpreted through an environmental lens, they have not yielded a novel conceptual architecture.

When considered within the context of established leadership theories—especially transformational, ethical, and sustainable leadership—green leadership is largely positioned within a conceptual continuity. While centering environmental responsiveness differentiates it in content, this difference has not produced an independent theoretical architecture. Mostly, it

reinterprets current leadership theories. This situation does not decrease the importance of environmental issues in the leadership field, but it requires a clearer discussion of the ontological and epistemological status of the concept.

From the perspective of philosophy of science, green leadership does not yet possess an established paradigm feature. The ambiguity of theoretical boundaries and methodological issues suggests that it is in its nascent stage. Besides, paradigmatic transitions are shaped not only by scientific anomalies but also by societal and normative pressures. The increase in environmental crises gives rise to new questions in management thought, and in this context, green leadership is being shaped as a normative call rather than a scientific break. In time, interdisciplinary interaction and institutional clarification may make it possible to evolve toward a more unified structure.

When taking into consideration the narrative and cultural dimensions, green leadership is not just an analytic category but also a value-laden orientation. It is inevitable that this orientation has different meanings in different societal contexts. Especially in developing countries, the tension between environmental priorities and sustainable development goals problematizes the concept's claim of universality. Hence, green leadership should be considered not only a theoretical model but also a meaning area that is reproduced contextually.

Within this context, green leadership is neither a fully established paradigm nor an easily ignorable temporary tendency. Rather, it represents a conceptual transition area positioned between normative expectations and scientific systematism. To improve this area, conceptual boundaries should be clarified, comparative cross-cultural studies should be increased, and testable theoretical models should be developed. Through such theoretical deepening, green leadership can go beyond being an ethical ideal and reach a more robust scientific position.

Theoretical implications

This study aimed to clarify the theoretical position of the concept rather than provide a direct refutation of the literature. Revealing the overlapping areas between ethical leadership and sustainability literature indicates a need for conceptual deepening rather than conceptual reproduction. In this context, this study contributes to the leadership literature in terms of critically examining conceptual proliferation.

Practical implications

From a practical perspective, it provides an important guiding framework for organizations. However, implementations without clarifying the conceptual ambiguity may lead environmental sensitivity to remain at the rhetorical level. Therefore, it is recommended that managers consider the concept not merely as a symbolic legitimacy tool but as a principle integrated into decision-making processes.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is that it is built on a conceptual and philosophical analysis. As it does not provide empirical evidence, the evaluation is limited to a theoretical framework. Besides, the analysis depends on the dominant theoretical approaches in the current literature and does not include alternative epistemological perspectives.

Future research

Future research may examine empirically how green leadership is interpreted in different cultural and economic contexts. Especially in developing countries, the question of how environmental priorities are reconciled with economic development goals is critical in terms of

testing the boundaries of the concept. Besides, studies that identify the concept's distinctive features and develop testable models can strengthen theoretical integration.

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