

The Effect of Generative Leadership on Sustainable Performance Through Mediation of Green Passion and Green Work Behavior in the MSME Food Industry

Muhammad Dede Jamaludin¹, Dudi Permana²

1,2 Faculty of Economics and Bussines, Universitas Mercu Buana, Jakarta, Indonesia

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the influence of Generative Leadership on Sustainable Performance in the Indonesian food MSME sector by investigating the mediating roles of Green Passion and Green Work Behavior. Given the growing environmental challenges faced by MSMEs, this research integrates Self-Determination Theory and Social Learning Theory to explore how leadership can foster environmentally responsible behaviors and improve sustainability outcomes. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the advancement of green leadership and sustainable practices in small business contexts.

The research design used in this study is quantitative research, with data collection method using survey method. and research instrument in the form of questionnaires share with respondents online is designed with specific criteria and weighted values based on a Likert scale. The research method employed is causal analysis. The sample consists of 279 respondents selected through purposive sampling. The data analysis model used is Partial Least Squares (PLS), and analysis technique applied is descriptive.

This study found that Generative Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Performance, both directly and through Green Passion and Green Work Behavior as mediators.

Generative Leadership, by encouraging environmentally friendly values and behaviors, plays an important role in improving the sustainable performance of food industry MSMEs amid market demands for sustainable business practices.

Keywords: Generative Leadership; Green Passion; Green Work Behavior; Sustainable Performance.

1. Introduction

Environmental issues have become an increasingly urgent concern across the globe. The alarming rise in ocean plastic pollution, with more than 8 million tons of plastic waste being dumped annually (Tekman et al., 2022), coupled with the loss of approximately 15 billion trees each year (Herndon & Whiteside, 2021), has significantly disrupted ecosystems and contributed to the acceleration of global climate change. These environmental crises have generated a wide range of interconnected challenges, including biodiversity loss, ozone depletion, increased frequency of natural disasters, and public health problems, all of which call for collective and immediate action (Afridi et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2020)

Sustainability has become a critical agenda not only for governments and large corporations but also for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which constitute the foundation of many developing economies, including Indonesia. The food sector dominates Indonesia's MSME landscape, contributing significantly to economic growth. According to the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs, MSMEs contribute 61% to the national GDP and absorb 97% of the workforce (Yani & Hayatun Sofian, 2023). Despite their economic significance, food-sector MSMEs pose substantial environmental challenges due to high levels of waste and pollution generated in their daily operations.

Food-sector MSMEs significantly contribute to environmental degradation, with food waste comprising 41% of national waste (Komalasari, 2024). Despite 95% of MSMEs expressing interest in eco-friendly practices, actual implementation remains low due to financial constraints, limited environmental awareness, and inadequate access to green technology and training (Rahman & Fardaniah, 2021).

Another alarming finding by Liman & Dewanto, (2024) reveals that 69% of Indonesian SME actors are still unfamiliar with the concept of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and many perceive sustainability as costly and difficult to implement. Consequently, despite increasing global discourse on green economy and sustainability, food-sector MSMEs in Indonesia are still far behind in aligning their business strategies with sustainable practices. Empirical studies highlight that sustainability in business extends beyond financial or technological capabilities, with leadership playing a pivotal role in shaping organizational values and behavior. Generative Leadership has the potential to drive sustainability in MSMEs by fostering Green Passion and encouraging Green Work Behavior, including waste reduction, eco-friendly practices, and operational efficiency.

However, despite the theoretical relevance of Generative Leadership in the sustainability agenda, research investigating its effect on the Sustainable Performance of food-sector MSMEs in Indonesia remains limited. In particular, there is a lack of studies that explore how Green Passion and Green Work Behavior mediate the relationship between leadership and sustainability outcomes. This constitutes a clear research gap, especially given the urgency of developing context-specific models for environmental management in MSMEs.

2. Problem Statement

This study examines the role of Generative Leadership in enhancing the sustainable performance of food MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) in Indonesia, particularly within the Jabodetabek region. Despite the critical contribution of MSMEs to the national economy, many still face challenges in adopting sustainability practices due to limited resources, knowledge, and organizational support. Leadership that promotes innovation, environmental awareness, and collaboration is therefore essential in fostering green values and behaviors among MSME actors.

This leadership–performance nexus raises important questions: How does Generative Leadership influence the sustainable performance of food MSMEs? To what extent do green-oriented factors such as Green Work Behavior and Green Passion act as mediators in this relationship? And how can these psychological and behavioral mechanisms strengthen the competitive advantage of MSMEs in the era of sustainability-driven markets?

To address these issues, this study aims to investigate the direct and indirect effects of Generative Leadership on Sustainable Performance by incorporating Green Work Behavior and Green Passion as mediating variables. Grounded in sustainability and organizational behavior theories, the research provides empirical evidence on how leadership fosters pro-environmental passion and behavior, which in turn contribute to sustainable outcomes.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- To analyze the influence of Generative Leadership on Sustainable Performance.
- To examine the effect of Generative Leadership on Green Work Behavior.
- To investigate the impact of Generative Leadership on Green Passion.
- To assess the effect of Green Work Behavior on Sustainable Performance.
- To evaluate the influence of Green Passion on Sustainable Performance.
- To examine the mediating role of Green Work Behavior in the relationship between Generative Leadership and Sustainable Performance.
- To analyze the mediating role of Green Passion in the relationship between Generative Leadership and Sustainable Performance.

By addressing these research questions, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how generative leadership drives sustainable performance in food MSMEs, offering practical insights for strengthening green behavior, cultivating environmental passion, and building long-term competitiveness in sustainability-oriented

markets.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Generative Leadership

Generative Leadership is a leadership approach that focuses on creating an environment that supports innovation, collaboration and continuous learning. Generative leaders not only provide direction but also empower team members to actively contribute to decision-making and the development of new ideas. According to Kets de Vries, (2011), generative leaders encourage creativity and employee engagement, which is very important in the context of sustainability.

Generative Leadership also involves the ability to create a strong and inspiring vision, and build trust among team members (Kurucz et al., 2017). In the MSME food industry, Generative Leadership can help create an organizational culture that is open to change and innovation, and facilitate the adoption of green practices. Research shows that leaders who support sustainability initiatives can increase employee motivation to engage in green practices (Javed & Raza, 2024)

3.2 Sustainable Performance

Sustainable Performance refers to an organization's capacity to simultaneously achieve economic, social, and environmental objectives. Anchored in the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework (Elkington, 2004). Empirical studies highlight that embedding sustainability into operations enhances not only organizational reputation but also long-term financial outcomes (Boeske, 2023). Moreover, strategic integration of sustainability is associated with improved competitive advantage (Lopes Da Costa et al., 2022). Within food-sector MSMEs, Sustainable Performance is reflected in resource efficiency, waste minimization, and contributions to community welfare, underscoring the sector's vital role in sustainable development.

3.3 Green Passion

Green Passion refers to an individual's intrinsic motivation to support environmental sustainability through pro-environmental behavior. It is positively associated with workplace engagement in sustainability initiatives and green practices (Yue et al., 2020). Individuals with strong Green Passion tend to exhibit higher environmental awareness and a proactive stance toward climate-related actions (Meng & Si, 2022). In the context of food-sector MSMEs, Green Passion serves as a critical psychological driver for adopting sustainable production practices and minimizing ecological impacts.

3.4 Green Work Behavior

Green Work Behavior includes actions taken by individuals in the workplace to support environmental sustainability. Afridi et al., (2023) state that green work behavior can be influenced by various factors, including organizational culture, management support, and individual motivation. This behavior includes waste reduction, efficient use of energy, and the application of environmentally friendly principles in daily work processes.

Green Work Behavior is important as a mediator between Generative Leadership and Sustainable Performance. When leaders encourage green practices and provide support to employees to engage in these behaviors, the results can increase the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives in MSMEs. Research by Kim et al., (2023) shows that managerial support for green work behavior significantly influences employee engagement in green practices.

4. Hypothesis Development

Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and Social Learning Theory (SLT) (Bandura, 1977), this study proposes that leadership plays a crucial role in fostering sustainability-oriented passion and behavior within organizations. In the context of food MSMEs in Indonesia, Generative Leadership—a leadership style that emphasizes innovation, collaboration, and environmental responsibility—is expected to influence both

psychological factors (Green Passion) and behavioral outcomes (Green Work Behavior), which ultimately enhance Sustainable Performance.

4.1 The Effect of Generative Leadership on Sustainable Performance

Generative Leadership (GL) is characterized by its ability to create a vision of sustainability, empower employees, and encourage innovative practices. Leaders who adopt this approach are more likely to promote environmental values and align organizational strategies with long-term sustainability goals (Hazy & Prottas, 2018). Prior studies have shown that leadership significantly impacts sustainability outcomes, particularly by shaping organizational culture and resource management (Afridi et al., 2023; Sajjad et al., 2023). In the MSME context, effective leadership is critical for overcoming resource limitations and driving sustainable business models.

H1: Generative Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Performance.

4.2 The Effect of Generative Leadership on Green Work Behavior

Green Work Behavior (GWB) refers to employees' voluntary actions that contribute to environmental sustainability, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and supporting eco-friendly practices. Leaders who demonstrate generative qualities—by modeling green practices and providing opportunities for learning—encourage employees to adopt similar behaviors (Bandura, 1977). Empirical studies highlight that supportive leadership fosters pro-environmental work behaviors, particularly in small business settings (Castillo & Trinh, 2019; David et al., 2017)

H2: Generative Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Green Work Behavior.

4.3 The Effect of Generative Leadership on Green Passion

Green Passion (GP) reflects employees' intrinsic enthusiasm and commitment to sustainability initiatives. According to SDT, leadership that supports autonomy, competence, and relatedness strengthens intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Generative leaders can foster such passion by creating meaningful work and emphasizing the ecological impact of organizational activities. Prior research confirms that leadership behaviors significantly enhance employees' passion for sustainability and environmental initiatives (Afridi et al., 2023; Aubin et al., 2004).

H3: Generative Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Green Passion.

4.4 The Effect of Green Work Behavior on Sustainable Performance

Employees' green behaviors directly contribute to the triple bottom line: economic, social, and environmental outcomes. Sustainable actions such as reducing waste, using eco-friendly materials, and conserving resources enhance both operational efficiency and brand reputation (Niesten et al., 2017). Studies have confirmed that GWB positively influences sustainable performance across industries, including SMEs (Sajjad et al., 2023)

H4: Green Work Behavior has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Performance.

4.5 The Effect of Green Passion on Sustainable Performance

Employees with high Green Passion are intrinsically motivated to engage in sustainability-related practices, which enhance long-term organizational performance. Prior studies demonstrate that passion for sustainability increases creativity, innovation, and commitment to eco-friendly practices, all of which contribute to superior performance outcomes (Castillo & Trinh, 2019; Macaux, 2012)

H5: Green Passion has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Performance.

4.6 The Mediating Role of Green Work Behavior

While leadership may directly influence sustainable outcomes, the presence of Green Work Behavior provides a behavioral pathway through which leadership translates into performance. Social Learning Theory suggests that employees internalize and replicate leaders' sustainable practices, resulting in organizational improvements (Bandura, 1977). Empirical research has confirmed the mediating role of employee green behaviors in the leadership–performance relationship (Afridi et al., 2023; Sajjad et al., 2023)

H6: Green Work Behavior mediates the relationship between Generative Leadership and Sustainable Performance.

4.7 The Mediating Role of Green Passion

Similarly, Green Passion provides a motivational pathway connecting leadership and performance. By inspiring employees to develop intrinsic commitment toward sustainability, generative leaders indirectly enhance sustainable outcomes. Studies in organizational psychology confirm that passion mediates the effects of leadership on work performance and innovation (Aubin et al., 2004; Macaux, 2012)

H7: Green Passion mediates the relationship between Generative Leadership and Sustainable Performance.

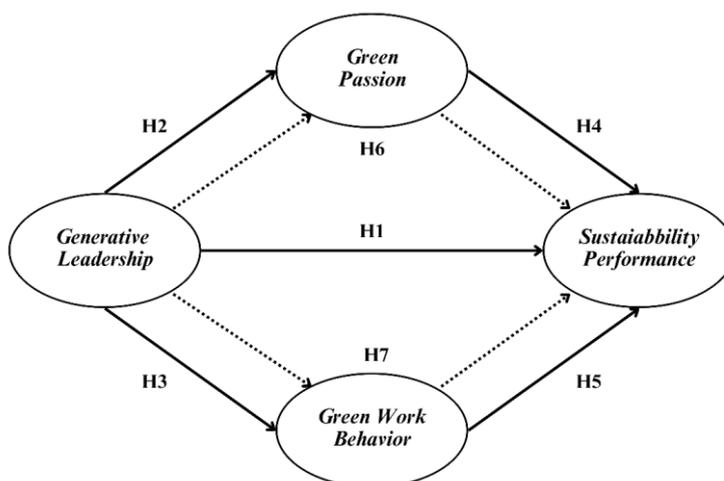


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework
Source: Author’s Data (2025)

5. Result and Discussion

5.1 Result

The table below presents the complete results of the calculations using SmartPLS 4.0.

Tabel. 1 Hypothesis Test

Dirrect effect

Relationship	Coefficient	T-statistics	P-value	Result
Generative Leadership → Sustainable Performance	0.296	2.020	0.043	Positive and significant, H1 accepted
Generative Leadership → Green Passion	0.901	10.643	0.000	Positive and significant, H2 accepted
Generative Leadership → Green Work Behavior	0.887	7.587	0.000	Positive and significant, H3 accepted

Relationship	Coefficient	T-statistics	P-value	Result
Green Passion → Sustainable Performance	0.215	4.642	0.000	Positive and significant, H4 accepted
Green Work Behavior → Sustainable Performance	0.186	2.955	0.003	Positive and significant, H5 accepted

Mediation Effects

Relationship	Coefficient	T-statistics	P-value	Result
Generative Leadership → Green Passion → Sustainable Performance	0.194	4.017	0.000	Positive and significant, H6 accepted
Generative Leadership → Green Work Behavior → Sustainable Performance	0.165	2.922	0.003	Positive and significant, H7 accepted

Source: Researcher

5.1 The Effect of Generative Leadership on Sustainable Performance

The path analysis shows that Generative Leadership (GL) has a positive and statistically significant effect on Sustainable Performance (SP), with a path coefficient of 0.296, T-statistic of 2.020, and p-value of 0.043. This indicates that MSMEs led by generative leaders are more likely to achieve higher levels of sustainability in economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Generative leaders motivate their organizations to adopt innovative strategies, implement resource efficiency, and build long-term competitiveness.

This finding supports earlier studies Afridi et al., 2023; Sajjad et al., (2023), which emphasize that leadership styles prioritizing innovation, collaboration, and responsibility directly affect sustainability outcomes. It also aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which explains how leadership fosters autonomy and competence to drive sustainable practices. Therefore, H1 is supported.

5.2 The Effect of Generative Leadership on Green Passion

The results reveal that Generative Leadership has a very strong and significant positive influence on Green Passion (GP), with a coefficient of 0.901, T-statistic of 10.643, and p-value of 0.000. This implies that leaders who embody generative qualities are able to instill enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation among employees toward sustainability initiatives.

These results are consistent with the Self-Determination Theory Ryan & Deci, (2000), which highlights the importance of autonomy and meaningfulness in fostering intrinsic motivation. Prior studies Aubin et al., (2004); Macaux, (2012) also confirm that leadership behaviors significantly influence employees’ sustainability passion. Thus, H2 is accepted.

5.3 The Effect of Generative Leadership on Green Work Behavior

Generative Leadership is found to have a significant positive impact on Green Work Behavior (GWB), with a path coefficient of 0.887, T-statistic of 7.587, and p-value of 0.000. This indicates that MSMEs led by generative leaders demonstrate higher adoption of pro-environmental behaviors, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and adopting eco-friendly production methods.

This result reinforces Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), where employees replicate leaders’ pro-environmental actions through modeling. Previous research Castillo & Trinh, (2019); David et al., (2017) also demonstrates that supportive leadership plays a key role in encouraging voluntary sustainability-oriented behaviors at work. Therefore, H3 is supported.

5.4 The Effect of Green Passion on Sustainable Performance

The analysis demonstrates that Green Passion has a significant positive effect on Sustainable Performance, with a path coefficient of 0.215, T-statistic of 4.642, and p-value of 0.000. Employees who possess high enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation for environmental initiatives contribute meaningfully to sustainability outcomes.

This result aligns with Castillo & Trinh, (2019); Macaux, (2012), who emphasize that passion for sustainability enhances organizational commitment and innovation, ultimately driving better performance. Hence, H4 is supported.

5.5 The Effect of Green Work Behavior on Sustainable Performance

The findings indicate that Green Work Behavior has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Performance, with a coefficient of 0.186, T-statistic of 2.955, and p-value of 0.003. This suggests that employee-driven eco-friendly practices—such as reducing plastic use, improving waste management, and conserving resources—directly strengthen MSME sustainability performance.

This outcome is consistent with prior studies (Niesten et al., 2017; Sajjad et al., 2023) which confirm that green behaviors in the workplace play an essential role in enhancing the triple bottom line (profit, people, and planet). Therefore, H5 is accepted.

5.6 The Mediating Role of Green Passion

The mediation test shows that Green Passion significantly mediates the relationship between Generative Leadership and Sustainable Performance, with an indirect effect coefficient of 0.194, T-statistic of 4.017, and p-value of 0.000. This means that leadership does not only exert a direct influence on performance but also works indirectly by instilling environmental passion that drives employees toward sustainable outcomes.

This result supports the argument of Self-Determination Theory, where intrinsic motivation amplifies performance outcomes. Previous findings (Afridi et al., 2023; Aubin et al., 2004) confirm that passion acts as a motivational mechanism linking leadership to sustainability. Hence, H6 is supported.

5.7 The Mediating Role of Green Work Behavior

Finally, the results demonstrate that Green Work Behavior also mediates the relationship between Generative Leadership and Sustainable Performance, with a coefficient of 0.165, T-statistic of 2.922, and p-value of 0.003. This suggests that leaders influence sustainability partly through encouraging employee pro-environmental actions, which act as behavioral mechanisms strengthening performance outcomes.

This finding is consistent with Social Learning Bandura, (1977) and empirical evidence Sajjad et al., (2023), highlighting that green behavior serves as a critical pathway through which leadership enhances sustainable performance. Thus, H7 is accepted.

6. Conclusion

The research on generative leadership and sustainable performance in food MSMEs reveals the following conclusions:

1. Generative Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Performance. Leaders who demonstrate generative qualities—such as innovation, collaboration, and long-term vision—directly enhance the sustainability outcomes of MSMEs across economic, social, and environmental dimensions.
2. Generative Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Green Passion. Employees develop stronger enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation for sustainability when guided by generative leaders, highlighting the critical role of leadership in fostering passion for environmental initiatives.

3. Generative Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Green Work Behavior. Generative leaders encourage employees to engage in eco-friendly practices such as resource efficiency, waste reduction, and energy conservation, thereby cultivating sustainability-oriented behaviors in the workplace.
4. Green Passion has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Performance. Employees who are intrinsically motivated and passionate about sustainability contribute meaningfully to organizational performance by driving innovation and long-term sustainability strategies.
5. Green Work Behavior has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Performance. Employee-driven pro-environmental practices play a vital role in strengthening MSME sustainability, proving that behavioral actions directly impact the triple bottom line.
6. Green Passion mediates the relationship between Generative Leadership and Sustainable Performance. Leadership influences sustainability not only directly but also indirectly through enhancing employees' intrinsic passion for sustainability initiatives.
7. Green Work Behavior mediates the relationship between Generative Leadership and Sustainable Performance. Leadership drives sustainable outcomes by fostering employees' eco-friendly behaviors, which serve as a behavioral mechanism translating leadership vision into performance.

In summary, generative leadership, green passion, and green work behavior are key determinants of sustainable performance in food MSMEs. Generative leadership directly enhances sustainability outcomes and indirectly strengthens them through employees' intrinsic passion and pro-environmental behaviors. Both green passion and green work behavior serve as crucial mediating mechanisms that translate leadership vision into tangible sustainability performance. This indicates that fostering sustainability-oriented leadership is not sufficient on its own; organizations must also cultivate employee enthusiasm and encourage eco-friendly workplace practices. For MSMEs, strengthening leadership capacity and embedding sustainability values into daily operations are essential strategies to achieve long-term sustainable performance.

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