Chapter 15

Green (Sustainable) Leadership 🔓

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Abstract

This study theoretically examines the concept of green leadership, which has developed based on principles of sustainability and environmental responsibility. Today's rapidly changing economic, social, and ecological dynamics necessitate redefining leadership. While traditional leadership approaches meet the needs of industrial society, a new sustainability-centered leadership model is needed in today's world, characterized by globalization, digitalization, and environmental crises. In this context, green leadership requires environmental awareness and a holistic management approach based on ethical values, social justice, innovation, and intergenerational responsibility. Green leadership has become an ethical choice and a strategic imperative for today's organizations. This approach contributes to achieving sustainable development goals at the institutional level by guiding leaders to balance economic success, environmental protection, and social welfare. The study highlights the growing importance of green leadership in academic and applied management literature.

This study examines the fundamental dynamics that shape green leadership under five headings: environmental crises, economic and market dynamics, societal expectations and consumer behavior, the international political and institutional framework, and the pressure for competition and innovation. These dynamics transform green leadership from a mere environmental orientation into a transformational tool that aligns with global environmental policies and integrates economic rationality and societal expectations. Furthermore, through theoretical foundations, the study explores the relationship between green leadership and the sustainability paradigm, its borrowings from classical leadership theories, and its place within the context of corporate social responsibility.

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1. Introduction

The The rapidly changing dynamics of the technological age necessitate rethinking the concept of leadership. While traditional leadership approaches have been able to meet the needs of industrial society, a new leadership model is needed in today's structure, shaped by globalization, digitalization, and sustainability. One prominent approach in this context is green (sustainable) leadership.

The increasing impact of environmental crises (climate change, depletion of natural resources, and the decline of biodiversity) directly impacts not only ecological balances but also economic structures, social well-being, and organizational strategies (Cengiz, 2025:150; Turguttoptaş, 2020:268). The process of combating environmental problems and transferring environmental values to future generations imposes various responsibilities on the state, individuals, civil society, and the private sector (Özdemirkol, 2025:36). Therefore, environmental problems are no longer merely the subject of environmental policies, but have also become part of a systemic transformation that shapes management, leadership, and innovation (Oktaysoy, 2025:109; Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73; Battal & Yılmaz, 2025: 461; Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023: 205).

The concept of sustainability entered the global agenda, particularly with the Brundtland Report of 1987, and was defined as meeting today's needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet them (United Nations, 2025). This understanding represents a holistic approach that addresses environmental, economic, and social dimensions. The Rio Conference in 1992 brought the principles of sustainable development, which consider the balance between development and the environment, to the forefront (United Nations, 1992). At the 2012 Rio+20 Summit, institutional frameworks for a green economy and sustainable development were highlighted with the final declaration titled "The Future We Want" (United Nations, 2012).

Meanwhile, changing consumer behavior and increasing environmental awareness have forced businesses to adopt environmentally sensitive strategies (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020: 229-231; Deniz et al., 2025: 68; Battal & Yılmaz, 2025: 478; Çavuşoğlu & Durmaz, 2019: 303). In this process, leaders' success has begun to be measured by financial indicators and environmental and social contributions (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023: 63). Thus, green leadership has emerged as an approach that focuses on achieving organizations' economic goals and adding value to society and the environment.

Consequently, leadership is being redefined in today's environment with a broad vision encompassing environmental and social responsibilities. This section discusses the theoretical foundations of green leadership, the relationships between the sustainability paradigm and leadership theories, and the dimensions of corporate social responsibility. The new dimensions of green leadership that it has gained in the technological age are also discussed.

2. The Dynamics Behind Green Leadership

Green leadership is a leadership approach rooted in the concept of sustainability and addresses the long-term responsibilities of organizations in terms of environmental, economic, and social dimensions (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025; Oktaysoy et al., 2025). In this context, green leadership represents an environmentally conscious stance and a holistic approach that incorporates ethical values, social responsibility, and intergenerational justice into organizational decision-making processes. Green leadership is not merely a modern management approach or organizational choice; it emerges due to global structural transformations and environmental, economic, social, and institutional pressures. In today's complex and dynamic business environment, leaders' adoption of a sustainability-centered approach is not limited to assuming environmental responsibility; it also encompasses strategic decision-making processes, innovation orientations, and social interactions (Altıntaş, 2023; Önen & Elkırmış, 2022).

In this context, five fundamental dynamics that necessitate green leadership stand out: environmental crises, transformations in economic and market conditions, societal expectations and consumer behavior, international political and institutional frameworks, and the pressures for competition and innovation. Studies in the literature (Ay & Yılmaz, 2004; Azazi & Uzma, 2022; Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020; Bayrakdaroğlu et.al., 2023; Erkan et.al, 2013; Onat & Yükselen, 2024; Torun, 2022; Oktaysoy, 2025; Özalp, 2022; Yangil, 2016) examine these dynamics from different perspectives and demonstrate the necessity of green leadership. Table 1 summarizes these dynamics that shape green leadership and shows the reflection of each in organizations. This table clearly demonstrates the scope of green leadership, encompassing its environmental, economic, social, and institutional dimensions.

Table 1. Key Dynamics Shaping Green Leadership

Dynamic	Definition / Explanation	Reflection in Green Leadership
Environmental Crises	Climate change, depletion of natural resources, energy crises	Integrating environmental risks into strategic management, assuming ecological responsibility
Economic and Market Dynamics	Green economy, sustainable business models, emerging sectors	Seizing new market opportunities, developing sustainable business strategies
Societal Expectations	Consumers' demand for eco-friendly products and social responsibility	Building corporate reputation and trust, implementing green marketing strategies
International Framework	Paris Agreement, Rio Summits, Agenda 21	Aligning global norms and standards with organizational strategy and vision
Competition and Innovation	Green innovation, eco-friendly technologies, digital transformation	Directing innovation toward sustainability, achieving competitive advantage

As can be seen from the table, green leadership is not a one-dimensional phenomenon but rather the product of a multifaceted and integrated transformation. Environmental crises drive leaders and organizations to assume ecological responsibility, while transformations in economic and market conditions make adopting sustainable business models imperative. On the other hand, societal expectations and consumer behaviors compel leaders to develop strategies that build corporate reputation and public trust.

International political and institutional frameworks embodied in documents such as the Brundtland Report, the Rio Summits, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement necessitate aligning global norms with organizational strategies. Finally, the pressure of competition and innovation requires leaders to achieve both competitive and sustainable organizational performance through eco-friendly technologies and green innovation.

In light of these dynamics, green leadership not only responds to current challenges but also represents a multidimensional leadership approach that reshapes the organizational and social structures of the future around the axis of sustainability. The five fundamental dynamics that necessitate the emergence of green leadership assign leaders multidimensional responsibilities beyond mere environmental concerns, encompassing the pursuit of economic opportunities, the fulfillment of societal expectations, alignment with international norms, and the strategic direction of innovation.

Therefore, understanding and operationalizing green leadership within organizations requires examining the role of each dynamic individually. The following sections will discuss the influence of each factor from environmental crises to economic and market dynamics, societal expectations to international institutional frameworks, and innovation pressures to competitive imperatives in detail. This approach reveals how leadership behaviors and organizational strategies are shaped within the sustainability framework.

3. The concept Global Environmental Crises

Of green leadership places ecological concerns at the core of business strategies, aiming not only to respond to crises but also to create new opportunities for organizational success. At this point, the notions of green management and innovation emerge as fundamental components of leadership. Global environmental issues such as climate change, drought, energy crises, floods, and biodiversity loss directly affect the living conditions of both individuals and organizations. These developments have made it necessary to redefine the understanding of leadership, thereby promoting the formulation and implementation of environmentally friendly development and growth policies (Erkan et al., 2013; Demir et al., 2025). Environmental crises have disrupted ecological balance and become structural pressures that transform economic systems, social structures, and organizational strategies (Oktaysoy, 2025:109). Therefore, green leadership is not merely a reaction to environmental problems but a transformation process compelled by these problems.

In this context, Battal and Yılmaz (2025:459–460) define green management as an approach in which businesses center all their activities around environmental considerations by considering their ecological responsibilities. This perspective is not independent of organizational objectives; on the contrary, it is almost impossible for a company that disregards environmental issues to achieve long-term competitiveness. Hence, environmental crises serve not only as a threat but also as a catalyst for organizational transformation and renewal in green leadership.

As Bayrakdaroğlu et al. (2023:205) emphasize, green innovations also stand at the heart of this transformation process. New ideas, products, and processes that reduce environmental burdens provide both a response to the threats posed by crises and an opportunity for achieving sustainable development goals. Similarly, Kuşat (2013: 4898) underlines that environmental degradation obliges countries to develop sustainable policies

that preserve the balance of natural resources rather than focusing solely on economic growth.

In summary, global environmental crises have positioned green leadership as a management model rooted in ecological concerns and a central component of organizational transformation and the pursuit of sustainable development. Therefore, environmental problems can be regarded as both the driving force and the transformative power behind the emergence of green leadership.

3.1. Economic and Market Dynamics

One key dynamic behind green leadership is the influence of economic and market conditions. Today, the pressures created by environmental issues impact ecological systems and have profound effects on economic systems (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020:223; Onat & Yükselen, 2024:1710). The costs associated with climate change, the gradual depletion of natural resources, and fluctuations in energy prices necessitate a sustainability-oriented restructuring of economies (Deniz et al., 2025:68; Özalp & Erbaşı, 2022:41). In this context, the shift of businesses and governments toward environmentally friendly investments emerges not merely as an ethical responsibility but also as an economic imperative (Deniz et al., 2025:76).

From the perspective of market dynamics, the transformation in consumer behavior is particularly noteworthy (Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023:200). The increasing prevalence of environmentally conscious consumers has rapidly driven demand for eco-friendly products and services (Onat & Yükselen, 2024:1711). This trend compels companies to develop sustainability strategies to protect their brand value and secure a competitive advantage. Investments in green technologies, renewable energy, and carbon-neutral production processes contribute to environmental protection and open the door to long-term economic gains.

The impact of economic and market dynamics on green leadership can be considered a driving force of transformation. Green leadership is fueled by environmental sensitivity, economic rationality, and changing market conditions. Therefore, green leadership holds the potential to guide a sustainable transformation while balancing environmental policies with economic considerations.

3.2. Social Expectations and Consumer Behavior

It One of the prominent dynamics in the development of green leadership is societal expectations and consumer behavior. The growing environmental

awareness among societies exerts direct pressure on organizations and leaders. In this regard, Onat and Yükselen (2024) emphasize that societal expectations directly shape corporate sustainability strategies, while Bahçecik and Talebi (2020) point out that this transformation in consumer behavior brings green marketing and sustainable brand value to the forefront. Accordingly, green leadership becomes a critical element in fulfilling environmental responsibilities and building social trust and corporate reputation.

In recent years, societies' recognition of the seriousness of environmental problems and disasters has led individuals to adopt more environmentally conscious attitudes (Çavuşoğlu & Durmaz, 2019: 303). The rise in environmental concern and awareness has resulted in significant changes in consumer behavior, leading to an increasing demand for eco-friendly products and services (Çavuşoğlu & Durmaz, 2019: 304).

Since the sustainability of the ecosystem is directly linked to human activity, societal sensitivity toward environmental issues has grown. As environmental concerns have risen, consumer interest in sustainable products and services has also increased, making sustainable marketing a globally significant issue. Onat and Yükselen (2024: 1710) note that sustainability-oriented marketing strategies focus on conserving and regenerating natural resources, reaching large audiences, transforming consumption habits, and enhancing consumer awareness. Similarly, green purchasing behavior is defined as a conscious consumption process to reduce environmental impacts and preserve natural resources (Onat & Yükselen, 2024: 1711).

Today's consumers pay attention to fulfilling their needs and whether companies comply with social norms, respect natural life, and fulfill their social responsibilities. Individuals with positive environmental attitudes express a stronger willingness to make an effort to purchase products from environmentally responsible companies. This tendency positively influences corporate environmental image and contributes to competitive advantage (Çavuşoğlu & Durmaz, 2019, p. 304). In this context, consumer demands especially in developed countries are increasingly becoming a preference for partnering with companies that prioritize environmental responsibility and social justice (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020: 231). Research thus highlights that companies must pursue profit and demonstrate environmental responsibility in response to a more conscious society.

As environmental problems intensify, individuals' consumption habits are also transforming around the axis of sustainability. Deniz et al. (2025: 69) define green consumption as the motivation of individuals to minimize environmental impacts throughout purchasing, usage, and disposal

processes. In this respect, societal expectations and consumer behaviors constitute one of the strongest driving forces behind green leadership. Indeed, green leadership is about responding to environmental crises and guiding a sustainable transformation by addressing societal demands.

3.3. International Political and Institutional Framework

One The international political and institutional framework is one of the most significant dynamics behind green leadership. Ay and Yılmaz (2004) emphasize that Agenda 21 assigns important responsibilities to industrial organizations based on the principle of sustainability. In this context, green leadership must respond to local organizational needs and global responsibilities. Global environmental policies directly shape leadership approaches. The concept of sustainability was first defined at the international level in the Brundtland Report (1987) and was subsequently reinforced through the 1992 Rio Summit and the 2012 Rio+20 Summit. The institutionalization of this process has been achieved through the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which impose comprehensive responsibilities on all actors from states to businesses.

The impact of internationally developed environmental policies on businesses is quite evident. The environmental damage caused by corporations is considered one of the main contributors to global environmental problems. Therefore, companies must develop environmentally sensitive strategies at every stage from defining their mission and objectives to managing production processes and waste management. However, several challenges arise during implementation: securing financial resources, obtaining the necessary human capital for eco-friendly production, and anticipating consumer reactions to green products can all limit corporate environmental strategies (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020:229). Despite these constraints, green leadership provides the vision and strategic guidance needed to overcome such obstacles, leading organizations toward a more sustainable future.

Within this framework, green marketing constitutes a key dimension of how global environmental policies are reflected in local practices. Green marketing represents a holistic approach that reshapes corporate marketing activities around the axis of environmental responsibility (Deniz et al., 2025: 68). Developed in line with international institutional regulations and consumer demands, this approach enables green leadership to balance economic and environmental responsibilities.

In conclusion, the international political and institutional framework is one of the fundamental dynamics driving green leadership. The process

extending from the Brundtland Report to the Sustainable Development Goals represents the evolution of global environmental policies and the institutionalization of the green leadership concept itself. In this regard, green leadership distinguishes itself through its ability to integrate global responsibilities into local strategies.

3.4. Competition and Innovation Pressure

In In today's world, where globalization is accelerating, technological developments are intensifying, and markets are becoming increasingly competitive, the sustainable survival of businesses depends on their ability to move beyond traditional leadership models and adopt contemporary leadership styles (Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023:199). In this context, green leadership is not merely an approach representing environmental sensitivity, but also a strategic orientation that responds to innovation and competitive pressures.

The literature emphasizes that innovation processes cannot achieve lasting success without environmental sustainability. From this perspective, green leaders do not view innovation solely as a tool for gaining a competitive advantage; instead, they direct it toward combating climate change, reducing environmental burdens, and generating social benefits. Indeed, Bayrakdaroğlu et.al., (2023) highlight the strong relationship between transformational leadership characteristics and green innovation, arguing that leaders should position environmentally oriented innovations at the core of organizational culture.

Businesses' close observation of their competitors facilitates the rapid diffusion of environmental initiatives. When firms notice that their competitors are developing eco-friendly products and processes, they tend to improve their activities similarly. This demonstrates that competitive pressure plays a decisive role in the spread of environmentally responsible behaviors (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020:232). Thus, competition contributes not to the postponement of environmental responsibility, but rather to its acceleration.

Although innovation is often associated with technological inventions and discoveries, it actually encompasses not only technical progress but also multi-dimensional domains of organizational development, such as products, processes, behaviors, marketing, and strategy (Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023:200). In this framework, green innovation refers not merely to the creation and implementation of new ideas, but also to organizational processes, products, and practices that reduce environmental impacts and

contribute to ecological sustainability goals (Ben Arfi et al., 2018; cited in Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023:200-205).

Therefore, in contemporary organizations, competitive and innovation pressures constitute one of the key dynamics shaping green leadership. Green leaders perceive these pressures not merely as obligations but as opportunities that strengthen the vision of corporate sustainability. Thus, innovation becomes a strategic instrument that provides organizations with social and competitive advantages while offering solutions to environmental problems.

4. The Theoretical Foundations of Green Leadership

Green Green leadership is a sustainability-oriented and distinctive approach that responds to modern organizations' increasing demands for environmental and social responsibility. This form of leadership not only aims for organizational success but also places normative values such as environmental sensitivity, social benefit, sustainability, and intergenerational justice at its core (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:464; Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:62,73). The contributions of various disciplines shape the theoretical foundation of green leadership. It can be analyzed in three main dimensions: the sustainability paradigm, its relationship with classical leadership theories, and the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

The sustainability paradigm constitutes the fundamental framework of green leadership and envisions the integrated management of organizations' economic, environmental, and social objectives (Azazi & Uzma, 2022; Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:460; Kılıçoğlu, 2005; Turguttoptaş, 2020:268; Oktaysoy, 2025:115). Its relationship with leadership theories demonstrates how green leadership reinterprets the insights of classical leadership approaches through the lens of sustainability and environmental-social responsibility (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025; Oktaysoy, 2025; Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73). Finally, the corporate social responsibility dimension reveals how green leadership integrates environmental and social contributions into organizational vision and strategic decision-making processes (Yangil, 2016:134; Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020; Onat & Yükselen, 2024).

When these three dimensions are evaluated together, green leadership emerges as an environmental management approach and a holistic theoretical framework that shapes organizational identity, culture, and social impact. The following sub-sections examine these fundamental dimensions in detail.

4.1. Sustainability Paradigm

Sustainability Sustainability constitutes the most critical concept underpinning the theoretical foundation of green leadership. The definition articulated in the "Brundtland Report" meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Turguttoptaş, 2020:269) positions sustainability as a holistic framework that integrates environmental, economic, and social dimensions (Kuşat, 2013:4899; Kılıçoğlu, 2005, p. 11). This definition demonstrates that sustainability is not merely an environmental policy but a normative paradigm that reshapes organizations' strategic orientations and leadership practices (Azazi & Uzma, 2022; Cengiz, 2025:855).

At the organizational level, sustainability takes form through efficient resource use, ecosystem preservation, and the integrated management of social responsibilities. Battal and Yılmaz (2025) conceptualize sustainability as a theoretical and practical framework, emphasizing its role as a business strategic foundation (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:460–464). Thus, sustainability transcends its environmental character, linking itself to organizational identity, performance, and competitive strategy (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:464; Onat & Yükselen, 2024:1710).

Institutional applications of the sustainability paradigm converge in areas such as green organizational behavior, renewable energy practices, circular economy, and green logistics. Studies in this field aim to demonstrate positive relationships between sustainable leadership and internal processes such as organizational commitment, justice, and identification (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:478). Moreover, employees' green behaviors are emphasized as key determinants of organizational success (Özalp & Erbaşı, 2022:66), indicating that leadership plays a central role in achieving sustainability goals.

From a historical and international perspective, the development of the sustainability paradigm can be traced from the 1972 Stockholm Declaration to the Brundtland Report (1987) and the 1992 Rio Conference (Agenda 21), which deepened global commitment to sustainable development (Kuşat, 2013:4899–4900). The Rio+20 Conference (2012) highlighted the notion of a "green economy," linking it with sustainable development and poverty eradication objectives (Erkan et al., 2013:65). This global agenda paved the way for concrete actions under the Paris Agreement, emphasizing low-carbon transformation and the rise of sustainable finance (Turguttoptaş, 2020:268–269).

The sustainability paradigm requires a transformation of both economic and social practices. Barbiroli (2011) argues that the transition to sustainable development necessitates a structural shift from open-loop economic systems toward closed-loop (circular) and service-oriented economies. This framework promotes resource efficiency through product redesign, durable consumption models, eco-friendly technologies, and advanced industrial ecology applications (Barbiroli, 2011). Similarly, Kuşat (2013) stresses that green economy and sustainable development prioritize the effective use of natural resources and the compensation of negative externalities (Kuşat, 2013:4897, 4904).

Transformations in consumer behavior and marketing also constitute a vital dimension of the sustainability paradigm. Rising environmental concern and consumer awareness have increased demand for sustainable products and services, thereby enhancing the significance of sustainable marketing strategies (Ay & Yılmaz, 2004:26; Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020:227; Deniz et al., 2025:68; Onat & Yükselen, 2024:1710–1720). The literature on green consumption suggests that purchasing, usage, and disposal behaviors are increasingly motivated by the desire to minimize environmental impact (Deniz et al., 2025:69; Onat & Yükselen, 2024:1721). Consequently, organizational sustainability performance is shaped by regulatory and financial mechanisms and market demand dynamics.

The sustainability paradigm redefines leadership responsibilities. Sustainable leadership is conceptualized as a management approach that aims to meet stakeholder needs, create long-term value, and maintain economic, social, and environmental balance (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:460). Research indicates that transformational and responsible leadership approaches integrate with sustainability goals, enhancing organizational green innovation and strengthening employees' environmental awareness (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:461; Bayrakdaroğlu et al., 2023:205; Oktaysoy, 2025:111). Furthermore, recent studies highlight "green personality traits" as a growing area of interest in exploring leadership's influence on organizational outcomes (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:62).

In summary, the sustainability paradigm holds institutional significance along three principal axes: (1) conservation and efficient use of ecological resources, (2) social justice and protection of intergenerational rights, and (3) management of organizations within principles of environmental and social accountability. This integrated perspective transforms green leadership from a managerial technique into a strategic and identity-shaping framework for organizations. Within this framework, the green transformation of

enterprises should be understood not merely as an environmental or ethical requirement but as a comprehensive change process encompassing marketing, finance, technology, and organizational behavior dimensions.

4.2. Relationship with Leadership Theories

Leadership Leadership is the ability of an individual to guide, influence, and direct a group or organization. Leaders establish institutions' goals and build strong relationships with organizational members, helping to enhance their performance and motivation levels (Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023:199). As an age-old phenomenon dating back to the history of humanity, leadership has gained importance as a natural outcome of collective living and organization. It began to be systematically studied from the management science perspective, particularly after the Industrial Revolution (Yangil, 2016:129; Demir et al., 2010:129). Initially, leadership was explained solely through the personal traits of leaders; over time, the leaders' behaviors, decision-making processes, and impact on the organization also became research subjects. Today, leadership is regarded as a fundamental element that guides the behaviors of organizational members toward achieving goals; leaders assume multifaceted roles such as goal-setting, relationship-building, and enhancing employee motivation (Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023:199).

In the modern era's complex and rapidly changing business environment, traditional leadership styles alone are no longer sufficient. In this context, new leadership approaches prioritizing sustainability, environmental, and social responsibilities have emerged. Nowadays, green practices have been integrated into many organizational domains, ranging from green leadership to green product and process management (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:61). Green leadership emerges as a unique leadership form that draws on various leadership theories and reinterprets them through the lens of sustainability (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:461). This leadership style places environmental awareness and social responsibility at the center of organizational practices while drawing strength from charismatic, visionary, ethical, and transformational leadership approaches (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023; Oktaysoy, 2025; Şahin & Şahin, 2024).

Green leaders inspire their employees by serving as role models and contributing to developing environmentally conscious behaviors. Thus, the elements of motivation, inspiration, and value orientation that are prominent in transformational leadership merge with sustainability consciousness in green leadership. This underscores the critical role of leadership in guiding employees' environmental behaviors (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73).

To ensure green sustainability, national economies must be restructured with a "green economy" perspective (Kuşat, 2013:4897). Within this transformation process, it is essential to integrate leadership approaches with the vision of a green economy. Globalization, increasing competition, rapid technological changes, and sustainability requirements have made organizations go beyond traditional leadership approaches and adopt contemporary leadership models (Bayrakoğlu et al., 2023:199). In this context, green leaders stand out as inspiring actors who positively influence employees' green behaviors and job performance (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73). Consequently, the motivation- and change-oriented approaches of classical leadership theories merge with the sustainability paradigm, prioritizing environmental awareness, social benefit, and intergenerational justice (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:458–461).

Although green leadership differs from classical leadership models, it interacts with many leadership theories. Particularly, there are strong conceptual connections with charismatic, visionary, ethical, and transformational leadership approaches:

Charismatic leadership motivates individuals through impressive personal traits and inspiring behaviors; green leadership directs this motivation toward organizational success and environmental and social benefit (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73).

Visionary leadership relies on the capacity to establish long-term strategic goals; green leadership expands this vision to encompass ecological balance, sustainable development, and social welfare (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:458–461).

Ethical leadership emphasizes adherence to moral norms in decision-making processes. Environmental ethics questions humanity's impact on nature, highlights responsibilities toward the environment, and is grounded in principles of justice and equity in protecting natural entities and ensuring sustainability (Özdemirkol, 2025:44). Green leadership integrates this moral framework with intergenerational justice and ecological responsibility principles. Ethics plays a decisive role in shaping the behaviors of individuals and societies (Des Jardins, 2006:34; Kant, 2007:31). Accordingly, green consumption values are considered not only in terms of environmental awareness but also within a broader social and ethical context (Onat & Yükselen, 2024:1721). Especially for Generation Z, consumption is not merely a behavior to meet needs but also an expression of personal values, ethical stance, and worldview (Deniz et al., 2025:68). Therefore, young consumers closely monitor brands' corporate social responsibility

performance, environmental footprints, and ethical practices within supply chains (Deniz et al., 2025:71).

Transformational leadership encourages organizational change and innovation. Green leadership guides this transformation toward sustainability, green innovation, and environmental management objectives (Oktaysoy, 2025:115; Bayrakdaroğlu et al., 2023:205). Research indicates that green transformational leadership has statistically significant and positive effects on employees' green behaviors and job performance (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73). This finding suggests that managers' attitudes toward green transformation encourage employees to adopt similar behaviors, enhancing overall performance.

It should be noted that the green leadership approach combines the ethical, visionary, charismatic, and transformational elements of classical leadership theories with sustainability principles, creating a new leadership paradigm with a high consciousness of environmental and social responsibility. This paradigm aims not only for organizations to develop environmentally sensitive policies but also to rebuild organizational culture based on ecological awareness. Green leadership preserves the core strengths of classical leadership approaches while expanding them through an environmental and social responsibility lens. It motivates followers with inspiration drawn from charismatic leadership, applies the long-term perspective of visionary leadership for ecological balance and social welfare, integrates the value-oriented ethical leadership approach with intergenerational justice and ecological responsibility, and channels the innovative change dynamics of transformational leadership toward sustainability and green innovation goals. In this framework, green leadership combines the organizational success focus of classical leadership theories with environmental and social responsibility, offering a comprehensive, forward-looking, and sustainable leadership model for modern organizations (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025:461; Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73; Oktaysoy, 2025:111).

4.3. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Another Another theoretical foundation of green leadership is the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). With the advancement of technology and society's growing awareness, businesses must rapidly adapt to changes. This necessity has become increasingly imperative in contemporary times. Globalization and the need to preserve diminishing resources have turned social responsibility into an expectation for businesses (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020:223). Rising environmental awareness has

compelled businesses, as socio-economic entities, to consider sustainability in their production strategies and product designs (Karaca, 2013:100). In this context, CSR entails that organizations operate not only for economic interests but also for the benefit of society and the environment (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020). Green leadership places CSR at the center of the organizational vision, aiming not only to fulfill legal obligations but also to contribute to society and nature voluntarily.

Green leadership does not merely encompass all dimensions of CSR; it elevates them through a sustainability perspective. Economic responsibility no longer refers solely to profit generation but also to environmentally friendly production and sustainable growth. Legal responsibility extends beyond regulatory compliance to include environmental sensitivity and voluntary initiatives. Ethical responsibility is expanded to incorporate intergenerational justice and ecological values, while voluntary social responsibility projects focus on environmental protection and raising societal awareness.

The relationship between CSR and green leadership can be considered on three levels:

- *Strategic Level:* Businesses integrate sustainability objectives into their strategic plans. Green leaders view CSR policies as obligations and integral components of the organization's value-creation process (Battal & Yılmaz, 2025).

- *Cultural Level:* Green leaders make environmental responsibility a core element of organizational culture, enhancing employees' environmental awareness and strengthening the organization's societal image (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:73; Onat & Yükselen, 2024).

- *Societal Level:* As consumer environmental awareness increases, companies shift toward production processes and products that minimize environmental harm (Tuna & Yıldız, 2023:61; Deniz et al., 2025:71). This leads green leaders to regard CSR practices not only as tools for social benefit but also as critical instruments for the organization's long-term success (Bahçecik & Talebi, 2020).

Thus, green leadership treats CSR as a corporate obligation and a fundamental element shaping the organization's values and vision. In summary, green leadership emerges as one of the most effective practical embodiments of CSR, transforming organizational culture and societal perception through sustainability.

5. Conclusion

Contemporary green leadership has emerged as an approach developed in response to today's environmental, economic, and social transformations. In an era marked by deepening climate crises, rapidly depleting natural resources, and increasingly influential global environmental policies, leadership has evolved beyond a purely managerial skill to become a domain of ecological responsibility. This study demonstrates that green leadership is not merely an environmentally focused approach but a holistic management culture grounded in ethical values, social justice, and long-term sustainability.

The pressures created by environmental crises, new market dynamics, rising societal awareness, and international environmental regulations are reshaping leaders' decision-making processes. In this context, green leadership emerges as a transformative force that directs organizations toward economic objectives and ensures the reduction of environmental impacts and the consideration of social benefits. The long-term success of institutions is now directly linked to environmentally conscious production models, transparent governance, and trust-based relationships with stakeholders.

Green leadership draws upon transformational and ethical leadership approaches while reinterpreting them through an ecological lens. In this sense, a green leader is visionary, value-oriented, innovative, and highly responsible. In an era of rapid technological advancement, where digital tools increasingly guide decision-making processes, these qualities determine an organization's capacity to adapt to the future. Technological innovations such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, and automation systems offer significant opportunities for measuring environmental performance and optimizing resource use; however, their deployment requires a sustainable and ethical framework.

Today, leaders expect to sustain economic growth and implement a management approach that respects the planet's ecological boundaries and embodies fairness, transparency, and sustainability. This perspective makes green leadership not just an option but a necessity for the organizations of the future. As leaders' environmental responsibility becomes a central determinant of organizational culture and societal trust, the contribution of green leadership to organizational performance will become increasingly visible.

The development of green leadership also signals a transition to a new level of awareness in the management world. The balance established between economic objectives and environmental sensitivity is crucial for ensuring the continuity of organizations and securing the shared future of societies.

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