

Seeds in Concrete: How Women Leaders Drive Organizational Change in the Climate Transition

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Abstract: The low-carbon transition confronts organizations with a double challenge: developing the technological solutions required to reduce emissions and building the organizational capabilities needed to generate, circulate, and apply the knowledge that makes those solutions viable. Leadership plays a central role in both dimensions, yet how gendered leadership dynamics shape knowledge processes within climate initiatives remains poorly understood. The study integrates perspectives from leadership, change management, and knowledge management to theorize how organizations navigate the complexities of environmental change. Drawing on deductive content analysis to examine interview transcripts and biographical profiles of twelve senior women managers across policy, finance, business, and activism featured in Reuters Events' Trailblazing Women in Climate 2026, the study investigates how women leaders operating across climate and sustainability ecosystems interpret and navigate the structural constraints they encounter, and how their leadership practices influence organizational processes to drive change in the climate transition. The analysis highlights that women leaders simultaneously diagnose and navigate a layered set of structural barriers while enacting leadership practices that are both individually distinctive and collectively oriented. At the individual level, their leadership is characterized by long-term thinking, adaptability, and a persistent disposition toward action even under institutional uncertainty. At the collective level, they function as connectors, coalition-builders, and disseminators, translating innovative practices across organizational and sectoral boundaries. The evidence indicates that excluding women from leadership does not merely reproduce injustice: it actively degrades the quality of organizational knowledge processes, misprices climate risk, and constrains systemic resilience across organizations facing fragmented governance and volatile institutional environments. The study contributes to research on organizational learning and sustainability transitions by analyzing how gender interacts with knowledge dynamics in contexts characterized by institutional complexity and urgency. For practitioners, it identifies organizational conditions that either enable or suppress the leadership contributions most needed to drive knowledge-intensive climate action.

Keywords: Female leadership, Climate change transition, Knowledge management, Change management, Organizational resilience, Institutional barriers

1. Introduction

The climate crisis has intensified scholarly attention to the organizational dimension of sustainability transitions, as the low-carbon transition requires institutions capable of generating, sharing, and applying knowledge across complex governance settings and evolving contexts (Meijerink and Stiller, 2013; Donate and Sanchez De Pablo, 2015; Moleka, 2023). Climate-oriented change depends not only on targets and commitments, but also on the capacity to coordinate diverse actors, connect expertise, and translate knowledge into action.

Despite growing interest in the organizational dimensions of sustainability transitions, three interconnected gaps remain underexplored. First, while leadership has been studied in relation to adaptive capacity and change management (Meijerink and Stiller, 2013; Ononye, 2025), its intersection with knowledge management in climate-specific organizational settings has received limited systematic attention (Yasin, 2025; Donate and Sanchez De Pablo, 2015). Second, most existing research on climate governance focuses on regulatory, technological, and financial enablers, leaving the relational and leadership-based conditions for knowledge mobilization comparatively understudied. Third, when gender is considered, the literature tends to frame women's leadership primarily as a representation issue rather than examining how it shapes the breadth, quality, and usability of the knowledge base available for climate-oriented change (Le Loarne-Lemaire et al., 2021; Moleka, 2023). The absence of a gender-sensitive lens in knowledge management research may lead to an incomplete understanding of how organizations build and deploy the capacities needed for sustainability transitions. The issue matters empirically as much as theoretically: if the leadership practices that enable knowledge processes in climate transitions are shaped by gender dynamics that existing frameworks do not capture, then current models of organizational change capacity may be systematically underspecified.

The study examines how senior women leaders in the global climate and sustainability ecosystem describe barriers to climate-oriented organizational change and identify leadership practices that enable knowledge processes in climate-transition contexts. It contributes to understanding how gender-informed leadership

perspectives can enrich organizational models of knowledge mobilization in sustainability transitions. Empirically, it analyzes textual material from Reuters Events' Trailblazing Women in Climate 2026, focusing on the accounts of twelve women leaders operating across the climate and sustainability ecosystem (Slavin, 2026). A content analysis approach is appropriate for identifying recurrent meanings while maintaining a clear link between theoretically derived categories and empirical evidence (Mayring, 2004; Rourke and Anderson, 2004; Manes-Rossi and Nicolò, 2022; Menichini et al., 2024a; 2024b). The narratives are treated as practice-based knowledge, because they encode situated understandings of barriers and enabling conditions that are difficult to capture through surveys or secondary data (Czarniawska, 2004).

2. Conceptualizing Leadership and Gender in Climate Transition Processes

Recent knowledge management research increasingly treats knowledge not as a static organizational asset, but as a dynamic capability constituted through social interaction and practice (Yasin, 2025). It implies that leading knowledge processes requires creating conditions under which knowledge can be generated, contested, shared, and applied. Donate and Sanchez De Pablo (2015) conceptualize it as knowledge-oriented leadership, combining transformational and transactional qualities.

Ononye (2025) extends this framework by introducing innovation culture and knowledge behaviors as mediating mechanisms linking leadership to organizational change. While these contributions are theoretically productive, they tend to treat organizations as relatively bounded units, which limits their applicability to sustainability transitions characterized by institutional interdependence, multi-level governance, and deep uncertainty. Meijerink and Stiller (2013) address these broader governance conditions through adaptive leadership functions: political-administrative, enabling, connective, and dissemination. This approach is more sensitive to the distributed and contested nature of climate knowledge, but it remains largely silent on the internal organizational dynamics, such as cultural resistance, knowledge silos, exclusionary practices that can prevent adaptive leadership from taking hold. Yasin (2025) and Ononye (2025) partially address the gap by linking knowledge management to organizational change processes, yet neither systematically examines the conditions under which knowledge mobilization fails, nor the role of leadership in dismantling such barriers.

A further limitation of the existing literature concerns its treatment of gender. Le Loarne-Lemaire et al. (2021) demonstrate that women in research and leadership positions contribute to innovation in distinctive ways, particularly in collaborative and interdisciplinary settings. However, this finding is rarely integrated into mainstream knowledge management or climate leadership frameworks, which tend to treat leadership capabilities as gender-neutral. It is theoretically problematic: if gender shapes how leaders build coalitions, navigate institutional resistance, and mobilize distributed knowledge, then frameworks that ignore gender are likely to produce incomplete accounts of organizational capacity in sustainability transitions. Moleka (2023) begins to address the issue by connecting gender diversity to knowledge breadth and mobilization, but a systematic framework linking gender-informed leadership to the specific barriers and enablers of climate-oriented knowledge work remains underdeveloped.

The theoretical framework developed here (Figure 1) organizes the analysis around two interconnected domains. The first concerns barriers to climate-oriented organizational change: institutional fragmentation and policy barriers (Meijerink and Stiller, 2013), cultural resistance (Ononye, 2025), cognitive and knowledge barriers (Yasin, 2025), and exclusionary dynamics related to gender and cognitive diversity (Le Loarne-Lemaire et al., 2021; Moleka, 2023). The second concerns leadership practices enabling knowledge processes, distinguishing between collective and distributed leadership, grounded in adaptive capacity and climate governance scholarship (Meijerink and Stiller, 2013; Ononye, 2025), and individual leadership attributes, informed by gender-sensitive perspectives on leadership and knowledge mobilization (Moleka, 2023; Yasin, 2025). These domains provide the conceptual basis for the coding structure used in the content analysis.

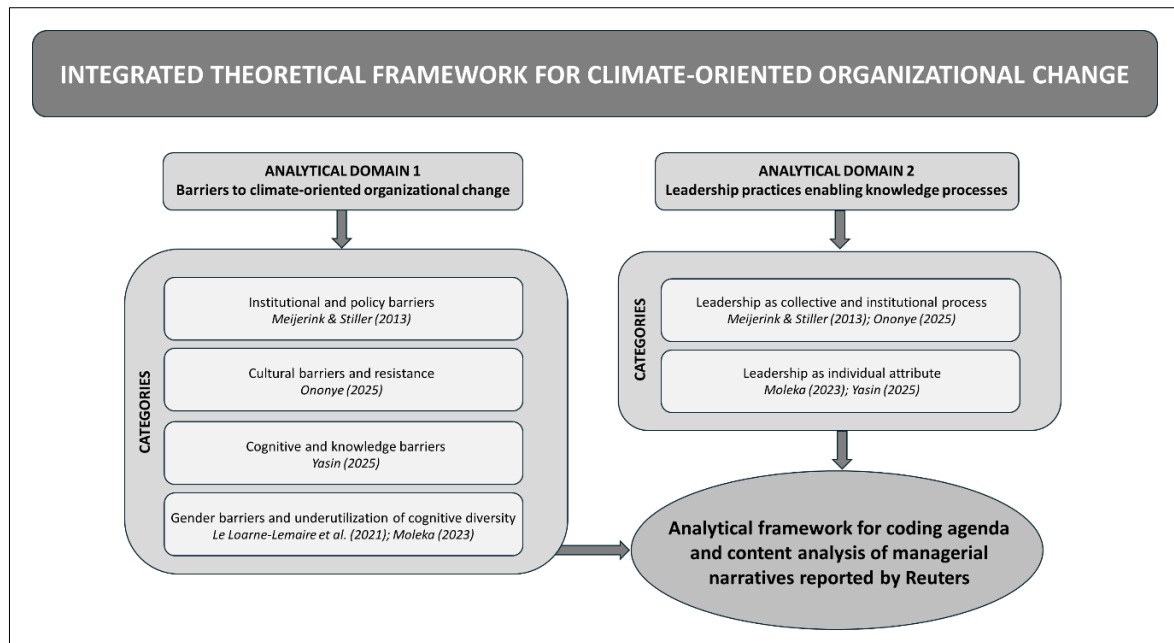


Figure 1: Integrated research framework

3. Data Collection and Method

The present section explains how the analytical framework outlined in Section 2 is translated into an empirical content analysis design.

3.1 Content Analysis Approach

The study employs a deductive content analysis design (Mayring, 2004), moving from the theoretical framework developed in Section 2 to a structured coding scheme informed by the literature. This approach is appropriate because the research question concerns not only the identification of recurring themes, but also how the themes are articulated in the opinions expressed by female leaders in the dataset. Content analysis enables the identification, classification, and interpretation of recurrent meanings within texts while maintaining a clear connection between conceptual categories and empirical evidence (Rourke and Anderson, 2004). It is widely used to analyze how organizational actors communicate priorities, practices, and commitments, and to assess the extent and depth of disclosed information in a structured and replicable manner (Calabrese et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021). It also supports the interpretation of organizational communication as a meaningful empirical site for assessing substantive orientations, commitments, and tensions between discourse and practice, rather than as mere rhetorical output (Manes-Rossi and Nicolò, 2022; Menichini et al., 2025). The coding scheme was derived from the theoretical framework and operationalized into the analytical dimensions presented in Figure 1. It was then applied to interviews and opinion statements from influential female leaders featured in the Reuters Events Trailblazing Women initiative, which identifies leaders through a structured nomination and evaluation process based on professional achievement, influence, and societal impact. The coding agenda comprises two analytical domains and six categories, covering barriers to organizational climate action and leadership practices enabling change. Table 1 provides an overview of the coding framework, including category definitions and coding criteria.

Table 1: Coding framework. Note: For each category, coding was based on a dichotomous rule: a textual segment was coded YES when it matched the operational definition and corresponding indicators of the category; otherwise, it was coded NO

analytical domain	Code	Category	CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION	operational Definition	EMPIRICAL FOCUS	Coding rule
Barriers to organizational change for the climate	C1_1.1	Institutional and policy barriers	Constraints related to fragmented governance, unstable regulatory conditions, implementation gaps and misaligned financial systems (Meijerink and Stiller, 2013; Le Loarne-Lemaire et al., 2021; Moleka, 2023; Ononye, 2025)	References to fragmented governance, unstable regulatory conditions, implementation gaps, political uncertainty, or misaligned financial and institutional systems that hinder climate-oriented organizational change.	How leaders describe structural obstacles to climate action	Code YES when the segment describes structural, regulatory, governance-related or policy-level constraints external to or surrounding organizational action. Otherwise, code NO.
	C1_1.2	Cultural barriers and resistance	Constraints related to short-termism, defensive organizational cultures, weak commitment and resistance to change (Le Loarne-Lemaire et al., 2021; Moleka, 2023; Ononye, 2025; Yasin, 2025)	References to short-termism, weak organizational commitment, climate hushing, defensive cultures, resistance to change, or reluctance to address climate issues in a transformative way.	How leaders describe organizational reluctance or inertia	Code YES when the segment highlights organizational inertia, attitudinal resistance, avoidance, or limited willingness to engage in long-term climate transition. Otherwise, code NO.
	C1_1.3	Cognitive and knowledge barriers	Constraints related to silos, weak integration of expertise and undervaluation of relevant knowledge (Meijerink and Stiller, 2013; Ononye, 2025; Yasin, 2025)	References to knowledge silos, weak integration of expertise, undervaluation of relevant knowledge, limited recognition of natural systems, or difficulties in translating distributed knowledge into decisions and action.	How leaders describe failures in recognizing and mobilizing knowledge	Code YES when the segment points to failures in recognizing, integrating, sharing or mobilizing relevant knowledge for climate-oriented change. Otherwise, code NO.
	C1_1.4	Gender barriers and underutilization of cognitive diversity	Constraints related to the exclusion of women and marginalized actors from decision-making and resource allocation (Le Loarne-Lemaire et al., 2021; Moleka, 2023; Ononye, 2025)	References to the exclusion or marginalization of women and other underrepresented actors from leadership, decision-making, finance, land-related governance, or other strategic arenas, with implications for the	How leaders describe the loss of diversity in climate-related knowledge processes	Code YES when the segment highlights gender-based exclusion, limited access to voice or resources, or the loss of diverse perspectives in climate-related organizational

analytical domain	Code	Category	CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION	operational Definition	EMPIRICAL FOCUS	Coding rule
				diversity and relevance of knowledge.		processes. Otherwise, code NO.
Leadership practices enabling change	C2_2.1	Leadership as a collective and institutional process	Leadership enacted through coalition-building, partnerships, coordination and translation across actors (Meijerink and Stiller, 2013; Moleka, 2023; Ononye, 2025; Yasin, 2025)	References to coalition-building, convening, partnership support, coordination across actors, dissemination, connective functions, or leadership enacted through institutional and relational processes rather than through individual authority alone.	How leaders describe connective and collaborative leadership work	Code YES when the segment describes leadership as collaborative, connective, system-building, or oriented toward aligning actors, institutions and knowledge across boundaries. Otherwise, code NO.
	C2_2.2	Leadership as an individual attribute	Leadership enacted through persistence, adaptability, long-term thinking and resilience (Meijerink and Stiller, 2013; Moleka, 2023; Yasin, 2025)	References to persistence, adaptability, resilience, long-term thinking, optimism, strategic orientation, or other personal dispositions that support climate-oriented action under conditions of uncertainty.	How leaders describe personal orientations supporting climate action	Code YES when the segment frames leadership primarily as a personal capability, disposition, mindset or orientation enabling action and continuity. Otherwise, code NO.

Each category is defined through literature-derived indicators, which guide the systematic coding of the textual material (Mayring, 2004; Rourke and Anderson, 2004). The unit of analysis is the paragraph or any coherent textual segment expressing a single concept. The coding procedure consists of four steps: (1) reading the Reuters material in full, including leader profiles and interview-based passages; (2) segmenting the material into analytically coherent units; (3) coding each unit according to its alignment with the conceptual definitions in the coding agenda, with further segmentation where different portions of the same passage reflect different analytical categories, and (4) consolidating the coded material to examine frequency patterns and inform interpretive discussion. The coding process involved iterative comparison and discussion among the authors to refine the coding framework, clarify category boundaries, and address ambiguities in the interpretation of textual segments. The collaborative procedure supported the consistency of coding decisions across the dataset. Potential discrepancies were discussed and resolved during the analytical process in order to strengthen the methodological robustness of the content analysis. The content analysis procedure was designed to capture both the obstacles that leaders identify in climate-transition contexts and the practices through which they describe enabling change.

3.2 Empirical Material and Sample Selection

The empirical material comprises interview transcripts and biographical profiles of twelve senior women leaders operating within the global climate and sustainability ecosystem, as published in the Trailblazing Women in Climate 2026 report (Slavin, 2026). The leaders are presented by Reuters Events as prominent figures across policy, finance, business, and activism, making the dataset suitable for examining how senior women leaders articulate organizational constraints and enabling leadership practices in climate-transition contexts. The sample's diversity supports variation in organizational setting, leadership role, and field of action. Such heterogeneity enhances the analytical value of the study by enabling the identification of recurring patterns across different climate-transition settings (Ahmad and Wilkins, 2025).

4. Results and Discussion

The content analysis reveals that senior women leaders in the climate ecosystem frame the transition not as a technical or policy problem, but as a fundamentally organizational challenge, one in which structural fragmentation, cultural inertia, cognitive limitations, and gender exclusion operate not as separate obstacles but as mutually reinforcing constraints on knowledge mobilization and collective action. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of coded units.

Table 2: Summary of content analysis results

Analytical domain	Code	Category	N. units	% of total CODED UNITS
Barriers to organizational change for the climate	C1_1.1	Institutional and policy barriers	13	19.7%
	C1_1.2	Cultural barriers and resistance	7	10.6%
	C1_1.3	Cognitive and knowledge barriers	6	9.1%
	C1_1.4	Gender barriers and underutilization of cognitive diversity	6	9.1%
Leadership practices enabling change	C2_2.1	Leadership as a collective and institutional process	16	24.2%
	C2_2.2	Leadership as an individual attribute	18	27.3%
	66	100.0%		

Leadership-related categories account for the majority of coded units (51.5%), with leadership as an individual attribute (27.3%) and leadership as a collective and institutional process (24.2%) outweighing any single barrier category. Among the barriers, institutional and policy constraints are the most frequent (19.7%), followed by cultural resistance (10.6%), while cognitive and knowledge barriers and gender barriers each account for 9.1%. These results suggest that the leaders are not merely describing constraints, but constructing the conditions under which climate-oriented knowledge can be mobilized. This supports adaptive and knowledge-oriented leadership perspectives (Meijerink and Stiller, 2013; Donate and Sanchez De Pablo, 2015; Yasin, 2025), while extending them by showing that individual and collective leadership operate simultaneously in climate-transition contexts.

At the same time, the co-presence of institutional, cultural, cognitive, and gendered barriers challenges linear models of organizational change: exclusionary dynamics do not only limit representation, but also narrow the knowledge base available for climate-oriented decision-making (Le Loarne-Lemaire et al., 2021; Moleka, 2023; Ononye, 2025).

The distribution is analytically significant in two respects. First, leadership-related categories account for the majority of coded units (51.5%), suggesting that the leaders in the corpus do not position themselves merely as observers of structural barriers, but as active agents constructing the conditions under which climate-oriented change becomes possible. This aligns with Meijerink and Stiller's (2013) model of adaptive leadership as a connective and enabling function but extends it by showing that individual and collective dimensions of leadership are held simultaneously rather than sequentially. Second, the presence of multiple, co-occurring barrier types across the corpus challenges linear models of organizational change that treat barriers as isolable and sequentially addressable. The data suggest instead that institutional fragmentation, cultural resistance, knowledge silos, and gender exclusion form an interlocking system: each barrier reproduces and amplifies the others, creating conditions in which knowledge-oriented leadership is both necessary and more difficult to sustain. Therefore, it has direct implications for how climate governance frameworks conceptualize organizational capacity, not as a resource to be accumulated but as a relational achievement that must be continuously constructed against structural resistance.

4.1 Barriers to Organizational Change

4.1.1 Institutional and policy barriers

Institutional and policy barriers constitute the most recurrent barrier category (13 units, 19.7%), a finding that is consistent with governance literature identifying fragmentation and policy instability as primary constraints on sustainability transitions (Meijerink and Stiller, 2013). However, the corpus adds a dimension that this literature tends to underspecify: the knowledge consequence of institutional fragmentation. Three interview-

based accounts—one emphasizing the gap between ambition and delivery, another calling for cross-domain policy integration, and a third observing the destabilizing effects of unstable capital conditions—suggest that fragmented institutions do not merely slow implementation; they actively impede the translation of existing knowledge into organizational action. When governance structures are misaligned, knowledge produced in one arena cannot be recognized, validated, or applied in another. The finding invites a reinterpretation of institutional barriers beyond their standard framing as coordination failures. In knowledge management terms, fragmentation operates as a structural filter that determines which knowledge counts as decision-relevant and which does not (Yasin, 2025). The implication is that strengthening organizational capacity for climate action requires not only policy stability but also the deliberate construction of institutional interfaces through which knowledge can cross sectoral and governance boundaries. The leaders in the corpus describe this as a core leadership challenge, one that is relational and architectural rather than simply technical.

4.1.2 Cultural barriers and resistance

Cultural barriers appeared in seven coded units, a lower frequency than institutional barriers but significant in a different way: while institutional barriers operate through structure, cultural barriers operate through meaning, shaping what leaders perceive as legitimate, manageable, or sayable. One respondent characterizes this as a temporal misalignment between organizational short-termism and climate long-termism, pointing to a deeper problem than mere inertia: it reflects a dominant organizational temporality that systematically devalues knowledge about futures that extend beyond planning and reporting cycles. A second account, centered on the concept of climate hushing, is revealed in this regard. The deliberate avoidance of public engagement on climate topics under political pressure is not simply a communication strategy, it is an organizational epistemology: a collective decision about what knowledge is safe to mobilize and what must remain latent. This has consequences that the existing literature on cultural resistance in organizational change does not fully capture (Ononye, 2025). Resistance is typically theorized as opposition to change; these findings suggest that in the climate domain, resistance more often takes the form of strategic silence and selective disengagement, what might be termed epistemic withdrawal. The knowledge management implication is significant: if relevant climate knowledge exists within organizations but is systematically suppressed or deferred, the problem is not knowledge scarcity but knowledge suppression. Therefore, leadership shifts from knowledge creation to knowledge legitimation, creating conditions under which climate-relevant knowledge can be spoken, heard, and acted upon.

4.1.3 Cognitive and knowledge barriers

Cognitive and knowledge barriers were identified in six coded units. While quantitatively less frequent than institutional barriers, this category is theoretically central to the study's argument because it most directly implicates knowledge management processes. Two interview-based accounts are particularly instructive. The first observes that natural systems remain undervalued and that disregarding local knowledge constitutes an unpriced operational risk, framing the problem not as a data deficit but as a classificatory failure: existing organizational frameworks do not recognize certain forms of knowledge as decision-relevant. The second argues that separating impact analysis from financial analysis produces mispriced climate risk, extending this point to the architecture of organizational knowledge systems: when knowledge domains are structurally isolated, the connections necessary for sound judgment cannot be made. The findings sit in productive tension with Donate and Sanchez De Pablo's (2015) model of knowledge-oriented leadership, which emphasizes the fostering of knowledge creation, sharing, and application. The corpus suggests that the primary challenge in climate contexts is not insufficient knowledge creation but insufficient knowledge recognition, the failure to extend the category of decision-relevant knowledge to include ecological, local, and relational forms of expertise. This is a more fundamental problem than knowledge sharing, because it precedes it: knowledge that is not recognized cannot be shared.

4.1.4 Gender barriers and underutilization of cognitive diversity

Gender barriers and the underutilization of cognitive diversity appeared in six coded units, equal in frequency to cognitive and knowledge barriers: a symmetry that is itself significant. The co-occurrence of these two categories in the corpus is not coincidental: two interview-based accounts suggest that gender exclusion and knowledge exclusion are structurally linked rather than parallel phenomena. Women from the Global South are underrepresented in climate finance not despite their knowledge of climate impacts but, in part, because that knowledge, local, relational, experiential, is not recognized as the kind of expertise that qualifies for decision-making authority. A second account's observation that Indigenous and community women manage forests, land,

water, and food systems while being excluded from governance over those same systems illustrates this with particular clarity. The finding requires a theoretical reframing that goes beyond Le Loarne-Lemaire et al.'s (2021) argument about women's distinctive contributions to collaborative innovation. The issue is not only that women bring different perspectives, but that the exclusion of women from climate leadership is a mechanism through which certain forms of knowledge are systematically prevented from entering organizational decision processes. In knowledge management terms, gender exclusion functions as an organizational knowledge filter that is not random but structured along lines of geography, race, and gender in ways that systematically disadvantage the knowledge most directly connected to climate vulnerability and local adaptive capacity. Therefore, gender diversity in climate leadership is reframed not merely as a matter of justice or representation, but as a precondition for epistemically adequate organizational decision-making (Moleka, 2023; Ononye, 2025). Organizations that exclude women from climate leadership are not simply less equitable: they are less knowledgeable.

4.2 Leadership Practices Enabling Change

4.2.1 Leadership as collective and institutional process

The accounts in this category describe leadership as a connective and architectural practice: building coalitions, convening diverse actors, circulating knowledge across institutional boundaries, and translating distributed expertise into formal decision arenas. This is consistent with Meijerink and Stiller's (2013) model of connective and dissemination leadership functions, but the corpus adds a more political dimension: in fragmented institutional environments, connective leadership does not merely coordinate actors, but constructs shared interpretive frameworks across divergent interests and knowledge cultures. Collective leadership in the climate domain is therefore not only a logistical function; it creates the conditions under which knowledge produced in different institutional contexts can be recognized as mutually relevant and transformed into actionable direction. For knowledge management theory, coalition-building in sustainability transitions can thus be understood as knowledge architecture: the design of relational infrastructure through which distributed knowledge becomes organizationally usable (Yasin, 2025). This extends Donate and Sanchez De Pablo's (2015) framework beyond the bounded organization, suggesting that in multi-level climate governance the relevant unit of knowledge management is the inter-organizational field.

4.2.2 Leadership as individual attribute

Leadership as an individual attribute was the most frequent category (18 units, 27.3%). The accounts emphasize long-term thinking, adaptability, and persistence as personal orientations that sustain climate-oriented action under institutional volatility. The interview-based accounts—one foregrounding a long-term horizon, another stressing models that can function regardless of policy changes, and a third emphasizing continued action despite non-linear progress—frame leadership as the capacity to maintain strategic direction when institutional environments provide neither stability nor reward. However, this reliance on individual persistence also exposes an institutional weakness: when leaders must depend on exceptional personal resilience to sustain knowledge continuity, the organizational conditions for climate action remain insufficient. Individual attributes are therefore necessary but not sufficient. They become organizationally durable only when embedded in collective and institutional structures that do not require exceptional personal commitment to function (Meijerink and Stiller, 2013; Ononye, 2025).

5. Conclusions

The study examined how senior women leaders in the global climate and sustainability ecosystem articulate barriers to climate-oriented organizational change and identify leadership practices that facilitate climate-oriented knowledge work. Content analysis of textual material from Reuters Events' Trailblazing Women in Climate 2026 shows that the leaders examined here frame the climate transition not solely as a technical or policy challenge, but as an organizational process influenced by institutional fragmentation, cultural resistance, knowledge-related barriers, and gendered exclusion. The analysis shows that leadership dominates the dataset, both as an individual attribute (27.3%) and as a collective and institutional process (24.2%), while among the obstacles, institutional and policy barriers predominate (19.7%). The distribution highlights leaders as active agents of change and shows how the climate transition is a complex and multidimensional challenge, shaped by structural, cultural, organizational, and knowledge-related constraints. Two enabling leadership dimensions are identified: leadership as a collective and institutional process, and leadership as an individual attribute. The results indicate that women leaders advance climate-oriented change by fostering connective and collaborative processes across fragmented institutional contexts and by demonstrating enduring personal qualities such as

persistence, adaptability, and long-term thinking (Meijerink and Stiller, 2013). A key implication is that gender diversity in climate leadership should be regarded not only as a matter of representation, but also as a component of the knowledge infrastructure that enables climate-oriented organizational change. Exclusion of women from organizational arenas where climate priorities, investments, and implementation decisions are made results in the loss of relevant perspectives, situated experience, and practical intelligence essential for resilient decision-making. Accordingly, the findings support the perspective that actor diversity in climate leadership enhances the breadth, relevance, and usability of the knowledge base mobilized for organizational change (Le Loarne-Lemaire et al., 2021; Ononye, 2025). The study highlights two implications. First, resilience in climate-oriented organizations cannot rely exclusively on stable policy support, as effective leadership also requires the capacity to sustain action under volatile or restrictive institutional conditions. Second, a long-term horizon emerges as both an individual trait and an organizational practice that enables actors to maintain direction, interpret change over extended periods, and ensure continuity amid uncertainty. The study is based on textual material from a single published source and a purposively selected group of twelve senior women leaders. Future research could extend the framework through broader comparative samples, cross-country designs, and mixed-method validation, including comparisons between women and men leaders to distinguish gender-specific from context-specific leadership dynamics.

Ethics Declaration: Ethical clearance was not required for the research.

AI Declaration: Artificial Intelligence tools were used solely to improve the grammar and enhance the fluency of the text. The content, ideas, and arguments presented remain entirely the authors' own.

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