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Sustainable practices and green competencies: Insights from hotel industry

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Abstract---Hospitality industry especially hotels consumes lots of water, energy, generates tons of waste and ultimately leads to environmental degradation. In order to reduce the impact on environment hoteliers should implement and follow the sustainability practices and focus on the competencies related to sustainability. Hotel industry can play an important role towards sustainability of environment. So, it is an utmost and foremost responsibility of the hoteliers to implement sustainable practices in daily routines of their business. Acknowledging this very fact, the present study focuses on two dimensions i.e. Sustainability Practices and Green Competencies and tries to explore the existing Sustainability practices and Green competencies exercised by category “A” hotels of Kashmir. A semi-structured interviews and check-lists have been formulated based on which In-depth interview has been conducted from 20 respondents. The study concluded with the fact that, in order to implement sustainability practices the employees must be competent. The findings also revealed green competencies required for sustainability development that technical skills regarding energy management, energy assessment, Information technology skill, behavioral change and motivation, Communication, Project management Skills, facilitative leadership, ability to grasp legislation, analytical, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and understanding of environment and sustainability issues and good IT and general office skills

Keywords---sustainable practices, green competencies, hospitality, hotel industry.

Introduction

Environmental Sustainability is widely regarded as the key to a successful business in the 21st century. It is fastly becoming a prime concern for public and private sectors alike, and the hotel industry is no exception. Environmental Sustainability means that natural ecosystems can continue to support life and provide resources to meet the needs of the present and future generations (NTG Alliance, 2019). The hotel business clearly has higher expectations of the environment and natural resources. On the other hand, the tourism business depends on the same natural environment – unspoiled landscapes, sandy beaches, turquoise oceans, glaciers, waterfalls, coral reefs, and pure air – which are all wonderful tourist attractions. As a result, there's a chance we'll end up endangering hospitality's entire base. The industry has swiftly adjusted to these developments and is increasingly becoming more eco-friendly. To a large extent, they are cultivating a green mindset and improving operational efficiency overlap. When hotel employees try to use as little energy, water, detergents, and other resources as possible while maintaining service quality, the result is the same: they reduce pollution and protect the environment. As a result, providing green competency training in the hospitality industry inevitably leads to better work organisation and operations. Green skills do not necessitate specialized ecological or chemical knowledge of substances and liquids used in hotels, but rather participation in the process of preparation and reduction of negative effects that occur during a hotel's daily operations. This study aims to explore the green Sustainability practices and Green competencies exercised by category “A” hotels of Kashmir

Literature Review

Concept of green Competencies

Steele (1980) defined green competencies as the ability of people to interact with the immediate environment in a way that is constructive and reflective of immense enthusiasm. According to the study, people require three elements to interact with the natural environment. To begin, the person must be aware of environmental concerns and have a desire to protect the environment; as a result, their lifestyle should cause the least amount of environmental harm. Second, people must be aware of the environment's core principles. Finally, they must maintain waste and emission minimization abilities to ensure environmental protection. Pedersen (1999) states that green competencies consist of (1) resource conservation, practice skills, and outdoor skills as part of environmental skills, (2) thoroughness as part of an individual's attitude, style and awareness, and (3) knowledge as well as a way of searching for and developing environmental knowledge. Fraijo-Sing et al. (2010) described that green competencies are comprised of two key elements, i.e., environmental knowledge and environmental skills, which need to be employed in accordance with the ecological requirement demanded by the society. In the management literature, Subramanian et al. (2016) asserted that green competencies can consist of two types: artificial and natural. Natural green competencies consist of an innate trait, especially environmental concern, wherein artificial green competencies consist of

dimensions such as knowledge, skills, awareness, and behaviour that pertain to the environment.

Dimensions of green competencies

The researchers after extensive literature review, concluded that green competencies are hierarchical dispositional constructs made up of green knowledge, green abilities, and green attitudes

Green knowledge

Green knowledge is defined as general knowledge about the facts, concepts, and relationship regarding the natural environment and the entire ecosystem (Fryxell and Lo, 2003). The construct is concerned with knowledge related to environmental issues and formulating solutions to solve such issues through the formation of green attitudes and green behaviour (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002).

Green knowledge is valuable to employee as it enable them to be eco-literate i.e. ability to recognize concepts and behaviour which is associated to preservation and conservation of environment (Laroche, 2001). It relies heavily on impacting state of knowledge about environmental problems, influence of anthropogenic interference in ecosystem and engagement in solving such issues which impacts their attitude and behaviour to buy green products (Goh and Balaji, 2016).

Green skills

"Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2011) has defined green skill as the professional and vocational skills, as well as the generic skills (such as sustainable approaches, innovation and problem-solving) required for new green jobs and the greening of existing jobs across all industry sectors as a response to climate change and sustainability imperatives (Brown, 2013, p. 23)". (CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational and Training), 2012). "As a vital GHRM requirement, green skills ensure the positive impacts of implementing an environmental management system which involves supporting education for sustainable development and improving pro-environmental activities (Kanyimba et al., 2014)". Imbibing green skills among the workforce ensures sustainable operations in an organization. The construct helps achieve green ability. Above all acts as a catalyst for improving the financial and environmental performance (Wu et al., 2016). Such skills are geared to analyze and synthesize the knowledge and ascertain the existing information on various environmental challenges and solve such challenges through the necessary course of action (Karimzadegan and Meiboudia, 2012).

Green attitude

Attitude refers to "the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behaviour in question (Ajzen, 1991)". In the context of environmental management, green attitude has been defined as an individuals' cognitive assessment of the value of environmental protection (Lee, 2008, p. 580).

Green attitude is a key variable that drives stakeholders to involve in pro-

environmental behaviour (Bergin Seers and Mair, 2009) . Green attitude has been defined as a feeling that includes evaluating environmental performance and taking action to improve it. As a result, cultivating a green mindset among employees is critical. The significance of environmental education is highlighted at this point, whereby such education develops sustainability and environmental consciousness to integrate pro-environmental traits among employees (Major et al., 2017).

Methodology

After considering the specific objectives of the study, the exploratory nature of the research was applied based on the qualitative approach. In this study, a check list has been formulated based on which In-depth interview has been conducted. The questions based on literature scanning were used for the data collection and the data has been collected from 20 respondents. The response has been collected from different energy managers of grade “A” hotels of Kashmir, after employing the purposive sampling technique. The responses received have been analyzed by using thematic analysis, coding has been done. The processed codes have been arranged in themes by using manual coding, axial coding and selective coding. The secondary sources of information were from published research articles, theses, books, websites, magazines, newspapers, national and international journals and government reports etc. The checklist included only four questions which were recorded and transcribed later on into English and used for analytical purposes.

Results and Discussion

The hotel industry is also adopting sustainable environmental practices with the participation of guests in environmental saving procedures which would not be possible without the continuous efforts of the knowledgeable and skillful employees. Hence, for hotels heading its way to sustainable development, the employees should be trained to be proficient in “green competencies”. The data received from the respondents had been transferred into the codes and transcribed as follows: Energy Consumption, Water Conservation, Waste Management and Sustainable Purchasing

Energy Consumption

Electricity and fuels account for a significant portion of a hotel's running expenditures. Energy conservation is a cost-effective technique to save running expenses with minimum upfront expenditure. All of the hotel's illumination is provided by LED bulbs, which, according to the literature, greatly cut electrical energy usage (Huang et al. 2015).

Outside, twilight switches are used, which are only activated in the absence of natural light. As mentioned in the literature by (Gavilanes et al. 2019), Hotels utilize motion sensors to turn lights on and off, as well as other electrical equipment, to minimise energy use. The hotel employs a card-key system in which the illumination turns on only when the card is placed into its own base and turns off automatically when the card is withdrawn. (Kim et al. 2015).

Compared to traditional systems, a heat pump with air conditioning consumes around 70% less electricity. In order to reduce the operational costs in hotels the employees must possess these competencies: technical skills regarding energy management, energy assessment, Information technology skill, behavioral change and motivation.

.....As for as the energy efficiency which definitely would not happen without the proactive behaviour of our employees. The employees of our hotel are able to know and understand how to minimize the use and maximize the efficiency of energy. The policy of our hotel is to exchange of towels and linen only if requested by the guest, to reduce energy use and water. We have installed Energy efficient laundry equipment Infact we have recently replaced high energy consumption lightning with LED bulbs thus creating skill in energy conservation. We are also sharpening our employees by imparting skill trainings and knowledge.

Water Conservation

Hotels require a lot of water because guests use more water when staying in hotels than when they remain at home (Charalambous, Bruggeman, & Lange, 2012) . Guest behavior is one of the critical causes of high water use in the hotel industry. Hotel visitors take a "pleasure approach" to showering or bathing, consuming far more water than they would at home (Eurostat, 2009).

It's also been shown that reusing wastewater may cut the new water needed by half (Green hotelier, 2006). Due to hygienic and health issues, almost all hoteliers believe reusing water is extremely challenging. Considering that water is a valuable resource, the following water saving competencies are involved in the reduction of water consumption are as effective Communication, Project management Skills, Facilitative leadership, Vision. One of the respondents said that

.....Our hotel has a Policy for water saving by the employees and the tourists. We have installed Water tap aerators and photocells for water consumption control. We prefer to provide only one water bottle to the tourists and insist them to keep the empty bottle with them and refill it from water coolers installed in various areas of the hotel. All the things are impossible without a skillful and talented employees that is there involvement in installation, Communication the details to others

Waste Management

Housekeeping washing machines use 60 to 80 gallons of fresh water each day, according to Raghubalan G & Raghubalan S (2007). On a daily basis, kitchen dishwashers use a significant quantity of water and electricity to clean silverware and crockery. Swimming pools at hotels and other lodging places need a lot of water and energy to keep them in good shape so that guests may enjoy them throughout their stay. Hayes and Ninemeier (2007) the use of air conditioning in hotel bedrooms, lobby spaces, some portions of the kitchen, banqueting rooms, office areas, and restaurant areas also incurs and raises the electricity bill, yet hotels cannot function without it

Using less expensive equipment that uses less energy and water is necessary. Miller (1994) continues to argue that wastage levels in the hospitality industry are shockingly high and require immediate attention and correctional implementations. In the food and beverage department, for example, beverage measurements are not always consistent, and the fact that servers and bartenders work long hours and at a fast speed all of the time impacts their precision in terms of measurements and guest quantities. According to Van Der Wagen and Goonetilleke (2004) waste management is an asset management program demonstrating the organization's commitment to environmental and social issues impacting the hotel and its environment. The competencies required are as able to grasp complex and dynamic legislation, effective communication skills, analytical, problem-solving and decision-making skills, an interest in, and understanding of, environment and sustainability issues and good IT and general office skills

.....The employees working in such hotels understand the importance of waste management, for this our staff is able to manage the waste, waste separation and its composition. We outsource or contract with companies who buy and process the waste. We have made newspapers available in common areas rather than delivering to each individual room. Also we have implemented the use of glass water bottles which can be reused after sterilizing measures. Further we use refillable dispensers for soaps, shampoos, and conditioners, thus reducing and reusing supplies packaging materials. However most of the hotels in Kashmir do not have Sewage treatment plants to reuse grey water.

Sustainable Purchasing

Sustainable Purchasing refers to the procurement of products and services that have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared with competing products or services that serve the same purpose (University of Louisville). "According to Giménez and Tachizawa, (2012) ; Prier et al., (2016), sustainable purchasing practices are purchasing from small and local suppliers; products probable for recycling or reuse; comply with labor rights; carbon reductions in the movement of products to facilities; operational excellence; product innovation; and willingness of suppliers to commit to waste reduction goals". The procurement of raw materials, production, manufacturing, packing, distribution, reuse, operation, maintenance, and disposal of the product or service may be included in this comparison. Sustainable purchasing can allow an organization to offset financial and environmental risk, rather than inheriting it from their suppliers.

..... The respondent demonstrates that our hotel employees facilitate the use of environmentally friendly products. We Purchase seasonal products from local market and prepare local dishes. Our purchasing teams are encouraging suppliers to packaging with limited environmental impact and order those that meet the requirements. We priority to containers and packaging made of 100% recyclable glass and packaging made of biodegradable paper or cardboard.

Conclusion

Sustainability in hotels allows growing from the inside to the outside. Understanding how green competencies are developed among the employees from the hotel industry enables hotel managers to increase overall quality in hospitality operations. Building this green attitude among employees would help hotels to develop efficient operations. When employees of the hotel endeavor to minimize the use of resources (energy, water, detergents, etc.) without affecting the service quality, the outcome is the same – they alleviate pollution and protect nature. Therefore, training on green skills in the hotel industry inevitably relates to better organization of work and more efficient operations. The findings revealed that there are set of sustainability practices adopted in hotels these includes Energy Consumption, Water Conservation, Waste Management and Sustainable Purchasing. The study suggested that technical skills regarding energy management, energy assessment, Information technology skill, behavioral change and motivation, Communication, Project management Skills, facilitative leadership, ability to grasp legislation, analytical, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and understanding of environment and sustainability issues and good IT and general office competencies required for implementing environmental sustainability in hotel industry.

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