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Hoteliers' Perceptions of Sustainable Practices on Small Hotel Optimization

Keneika Rowe, PhD

Problem

The management practices of the hotel industry are under scrutiny for having an adverse impact on the environment.

There is a lack of understanding around

- hoteliers in Jamaica only focus on foreign exchange earnings and job creation, rather than on sustainable development in their operations, and
- small hoteliers' integration of sustainable practices in their operations.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of 8 small hotel managers on the effect sustainable practices have on small hotel optimization.

Significance

Scholars have investigated the high performance of large hotels and their involvement in sustainable development but not of small and medium-sized properties (Bâc, 2012; Mihalič et al., 2012).

Many small hotel managers lack interest in investing in sustainable practices because they believe that they do little to no harm to the environment (Mensah, 2014).

This study was important because current management practices in most Jamaican hotels have an adverse impact on the environment, community, and economy where they operate (Bâc, 2012; Mihalič et al., 2012).

Social Change Implications

To bring awareness of the challenges that prevented small hoteliers from integrating sustainable practices in their operations and their efforts in preserving the local heritage, economic and ecological sustainability in which they operate.

To look beyond environmental practices and financial gains to how small hoteliers could put efforts in preserving the local heritage and support and maintain the economy and ecological sustainability.

Conceptual Frameworks

Stakeholder theory (Tashman & Raelin, 2013) indicated that management must give equal consideration to stakeholders as they do to stockholders. The key constructs or propositions underlying this theory are stakeholders' power, legitimacy, urgency, and other interests of the organization.

Corporate social responsibility (Carlon & Downs, 2014) has changed the way organizational leaders see their firm in a competitive market. The constructs and propositions underlying this concept are that corporations have not only economic and legal obligations, but also a commitment to the well-being of the community, society, and the environment.

Relevant Scholarship

Sustainable development (SD) focuses on three main areas: economic, environment, and social equity (Sloan et al., 2013).

The lived experiences of small hoteliers, and their aim to integrate SD are not well understood (Mihalič et al., 2012).

Hoteliers need to integrate sustainable development into their management operations to preserve the local heritage, promote social development, and improve economic sustainability (Svetlacic, 2016).

Implementing sustainability requires a working relationship between the government and the private sector, as well as stakeholders and hoteliers (Cook et al., 2014) for it to be fully integrated.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How do small hotel managers describe their effort in preserving the local heritage in the communities they operate?

RQ 2: What are small hotel managers' perceptions on the challenges that prevented hoteliers from integrating sustainable management practices into their hospitality operations?

RQ 3: How do small hotel managers describe their effort to support and maintain economic and ecological sustainability in their local regions?

Participants

To recruit managers or hoteliers of small hotels who had at least 2 years of experience in the hotel industry and had 75 or fewer rooms in their hotels. **Purposeful sampling** was used.

The **8 participants** were from 5 of the most visited areas in Jamaica: Negril, Montego Bay, St. Elizabeth, Port Antonio, and Kingston.

- 6 participants were owners and managers.
- 2 were general managers.

This small group of participants was diverse in their race, age, years of experience, and education levels. Their age ranges from 37 to 74, with the average age being 60.

Procedures

Design

- Phenomenological inquiry.

Data Collection

- The unstructured, 30 to 91 minutes interviews took place over the telephone, via Skype, and e-mail. An interview protocol was used to guide the interviews.

Analysis

Descriptive coding strategy was used to code participants' responses into various nodes. 101 subcategories were developed from participants' responses.

Findings

RQ1: The finding showed that approximately **62%** of the participants believed that to preserve the local heritage in which they operate they must encourage guests to interact with the local communities.

RQ2: The findings showed that approximately **37%** of the participants believed that high cost was the number one contributing challenge.

RQ3: The result findings showed that **62%** of the participants believed that the best way to support and maintain economic and ecological sustainability in their local region was to purchase local goods and services.

Interpretation

87% of the participants were currently integrating sustainable practices to reduce their impact on the environment. This finding was astonishing as the majority of the literature reviewed highlighted that small hoteliers refused to incorporate sustainable practices into their hotels because of the lack of financial resources (Battaglia, 2017; Mensah, 2014).

Limitations

Possible limitations include:

- Member checking was done during the interview.
- The data collected from participants were not replicable in other settings or environments.
- The data collected from these individuals may not be generalizable enough to represent the population.

Recommendations

For Hoteliers

- Buy more local products and services.
- Partner with the local communities by taking part in charitable events.
- Take small steps in implementing sustainable practices.

For Future Research

- Government support and assistance to increase optimization.
- Managers' perceptions of sustainable practices on organizational performance.
- Conduct a quantitative research design to increase the scope of the study.

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Committee Members

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