

The Power of Employee Participation in Green Management in the Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

This paper aims to highlight the importance of employee participation in green management in hotel firms. In particular, the study examined the role of employee participation in green management on cost saving as a hotel's performance indicator. We collected data from senior and general managers in Korean and US hotels. The results of the study supported our hypotheses, showing that the employee participation had a significantly positive relationship with cost savings in hotels. The results of the study also supported other hypotheses, showing that resource conservation and green building management had positive relationships with cost savings in hotels. Therefore, it can be predicted that green management can save cost in hotel firms. Such managerial implications are discussed.

Keywords : Employee Participation, Resource Conservation, Green Building Management, Hotel Green Management, Cost Savings, Hotel Performance

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1. Introduction

“Going green” is a worldwide trend in most industries. For some industries and firms, this trend can be crises because a variety of industries and firms have been facing increasing pressure on environmental concerns such as waste reduction, water and energy conservation, and/or pollution reduction. However, this “going green” trend can also be opportunities because it can decrease operation cost or increase firms’ positive image, for instance [Friedman and Friedman, 2009; Heikkurinen, 2010]. One may disagree that the trend and pressure on green management can be opportunities for hotel service firms to expand hotels’ business because there is an argument that the hotel service industry is silently destroying the environment [Alvarez et al., 2001] In particular, criticism exists in that the hotel service industry has not fully realized the importance of green management [Holcomb et al., 2007] and in that environmental issues are still neglected in the hotel industry [Alvarez et al., 2001; Claver-Cortes et al., 2007]. In addition, there is doubt regarding whether the green trend in the hotel service industry is permanent or will soon be disappearing [Pizam, 2009].

Hotels use power and water, and create waste virtually all the time, in order to provide the optimum service to their customers. Due to such reasons, green management and environmental responsibility has been one of the sensitive and important issues in the hotel service industry, especially as more customers base their decision on the environmental impacts caused by different hotels [Kotler and Lee, 2005]. Paradoxically, this is why we carefully selected the hotel service industry as our research context to demonstrate the

importance of employing green management. At least for the foreseeable future, the continuance of the green trend seems to be of importance given the increasing demands from customers who seek and support hotels that are environmental-friendly [Butler, 2008]. As such, the trend in green management and environmental responsibility can be opportunities for hotels if they wisely use green management. While there has not been a clear definition on green management, several researchers have defined green management as something that managers actually do to their firms in an environmentally conscious way as carefully as they can [Pane Haden, et al., 2009].

From the scholastic perspective, there have been efforts to follow this trend by examining the drivers for green management in hotel firms [Garay and Font, 2012; Tzschentke et al., 2004] and their effects on performance in hotel firms [Alvarez et al., 2001; Carmona-Moreno et al., 2004; Claver-Cortes et al., 2007; Molina-Azorin et al., 2009]. Each study has its own strength and interest in understanding on hotel service firms’ green management and its related performance. However, their approaches to understanding the relationship between green management and performance are limited. In particular, there is a limited view from an employee perspective on green management in hotel firms. That is, we rarely know about the employee participation program on green management and the effect it has on the hotels’ performance. The purpose of the present study is to focus on this limited view and examine how employee participation as a green management practice positively (or negatively) influences performance in hotel firms. To better understand the role of green management on hotel firms,

we also examine the relationship between performance and other forms of green management (i.e., resource conservation and green building management) in hotel firms. Therefore, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between green management, focusing more on employee participation, and performance in hotel service firms.

This study is organized as follows. First, we review literature regarding green management, especially focusing on employee participation, and performance in the hotel industry to propose our research hypotheses. An empirical investigation is conducted by collecting data through a total of 149 surveys, which were based on one-on-one interview of mostly general managers and a few senior level managers of participating hotels (i.e., 63 from the northeastern US hotels and 86 from Korean hotels). At the end of this study, we discuss the results and practical implications, followed by limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses

2.1 Green Management and Performance in Hotel Firms

Green management began to gain attention in 1980 in the hotel service industry and, recently, its popularity is growing [Mensah, 2006]. As Bansal and Roth [2000] suggested, firms implement green management mainly due to three differentiated drivers: a competitive driver, a legitimate driver, and an ecological driver. A competitive driver is relevant to increasing revenue or decreasing cost and its ultimate goal is to escalate a hotel's long-term profitability. Given the charac-

teristics of the hotel service industry, hotels' green management generally focus on resource management such as waste management and recycling, energy and water conservation, green building management such as eco-friendly design or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), and/or employee participation program [Alvarez et al., 2001; Bohdanowicz, 2006; Carmona-Moreno et al., 2004; Claver-Cortes et al., 2007; Erdogan and Baris, 2007; Mensah, 2006]. Hotels' green management is considered as a critical factor to affect the economic performance in hotel firms [Blanco et al., 2009; Claver-Cortes et al., 2007; Garay and Font, 2012; Kasim, 2009; Kirk, 1995; Tari et al., 2009]. In this study, cost savings was selected as a dependent variable operationalized by the hotel firm's performance, which is directly related to a hotel's competitive driver's goal. Based on the natural-resource-based view [Hart, 1995], cost savings has been considered as one of the key indicators of a firm's economic performance through green management. That is, cost savings can be a proper indicator of a hotel firm's financial performance and, therefore, is related with economic opportunities. Due to the difficulty on obtaining valid and accurate objective measurements of a firm's financial performance, the perceived performance, called subjective measure, has been used as a dependent variable in previous research (i.e., Chen and Tseng 2005). Dess and Robinson [1984] suggested that subjective or perceived performance measures are significantly correlated with objective or financial performance and it can be a nice substitute for objective or financial performance under the condition that obtaining objective measurements is not easy. Moreover, managers' perceptual assessment of a firm's performance has been used

to substitute performance [Pansiri, 2008; Parkhe, 1993].

2.2 Employee Participation

Employees in a hotel firm have been involved with green management programs such as employee participation or a green committee program. Our study denoted the employee participation program as whether a target hotel has a green committee composed of hotel employees or whether the hotel has an educational training program on going green for its employees.

Employee participation program can lead a hotel firm's long-term profitability as firms started establishing environmental or green committee composed of their employees and managers to supervise the firms' environmental activities as well [Bansal and Roth, 2000]. In a case study of U.S. hotel environmental practices, Enz and Siguaw [1999] revealed that employees in a leading environmentally friendly hotel show a strong sense of pride in their hotel's environmental programs. Their strong pride can lead to job satisfaction and eventually increase the hotel's financial performance. Simultaneously, a study conducted by HVS Eco services of more than 2,000 employees at 20 hotels in the U.S. [Withiam, 1997] showed that most employees in the study wanted their hotel properties to expand environmental programs and practices. This study also discovered that most of the employees feel proud about their hotels' active participation in the conservation of the environment. Such pride can increase employee satisfaction and productivity that lead to greater customer satisfaction and increase in repeat business [Choi and Chu, 2001; Kirk, 1998]. Such pride can also increase employees'

active participation on their hotel's green management and therefore increase profitability and decrease costs of their hotel [Kirk, 1998]. Therefore, we predict:

H1: Employee participation as a green management practice is positively related to a hotel's cost savings.

2.3 Resource Conservation

More and more environmentally sustainable economic activity will be powerful competitive advantage for most firms and such a view is called a natural-resource-based view [Hart, 1995]. Based on the natural-resource-based view, a firm needs to protect natural resources and the environment. This natural-resource-based view contains three domains: pollution prevention, product stewardship, and sustainable development. As one of the domains, pollution prevention intends to prevent waste emission and pollution and thus, it can be connected with a hotel's resource conservation. Conserving resources can save costs of firms. Our study denoted a resource conservation program as whether a target hotel has water and energy conservation programs and/or waste management programs. Therefore, we predict:

H2: Resource conservation as a green management practice is positively related to a hotel's cost savings.

2.4 Green Building Management

With an ecological view that comes from a firm's voluntary and intrinsic actions to help the environment and the social good [Bansal and Roth, 2000], hotel firms started develop-

ing environmentally-friendly designs. Such an ecological view may be also related to the natural-resource based view [Hart, 1995] containing different domains (i.e., pollution prevention, product stewardship, and sustainable development). Among them, product stewardship is associated with creating environmental product design and process [Hart and Dowell, 2010]. Our study denoted green building management as whether a target hotel is designed as an eco-friendly design or is a LEED certified hotel. LEED is also known as green hotel certification [Millar and Baloglu, 2011]. As one of the environmental practices, a hotel firm's eco-friendly design and/or LEED is also a strong proponent of the environment and meets the need of product stewardship. The opponents of LEED or eco-friendly designs tell that an eco-friendly design(s) or LEED needs lots of construction or renovation fee while the proponents for such a program argue that it will bring about more dollars from the customers who care for the environment and save costs for the future. Therefore, we predict:

H3-1: Green building management as a green management is positively related to a hotel's cost savings.

H3-2: All of the three green management practices are positively related to a hotel's cost savings.

3. Methodology

3.1 Samples and Procedures

To achieve our research goals, we asked a total of one-hundred forty-nine senior managers and general managers (i.e., 86 managers in Korea and 63 managers in the Northeastern US) about their hotels' green management and

performance (i.e., cost savings). General managers and most senior managers know exactly which green management practices their hotel has operated and how those practices have influenced the hotel's cost savings [Akrivos et al., 2007; Aragon-Correa et al., 2004; Chan and Hawkins, 2009; Chan and Wong, 2006; Erdogan and Baris, 2007]. Structured, in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data. The first theoretical population, hotels in Korea, was in a list of hotels obtained with a convenient sample from the Korea Hotel Association. The second theoretical population, hotels in the Northeastern US, was also obtained with a convenient sample and it was conducted as a college project by the third author who was a faculty member in a college in the Northeastern US.

Based on the previous literature, the survey instrument was designed. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section contained questions regarding green management such as employee participation program, resource conservation program including water and energy conservation, and green building management program such as eco-friendly designs or LEED. If employee participation program was implemented by the hotel, then it was rated as 3; if not implemented, then 1. The rest of the programs were rated as the same as the employee participation program. The second section consisted of questions regarding cost savings measured for the hotel's performance. The question regarding cost savings was: How much cost savings was your hotel able to achieve through the green management over the past 3 years on an average perday? The managers were marked either from 1 (not at all), to 2 (1-10 dollars), to 3 (10-50 dollars), to 4 (50-100 dollars), and to 5 (above 100

dollars). The final section consisted of general questions regarding the hotel property and demographic questions regarding the participating managers.

4. Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in <Table 1>. As shown in <Table 1>, employee participation is positively related to cost savings. The second green management, resource conservation, is also significantly related to cost savings. Lastly, green building management is significantly related to cost savings. We then ran multivariate regression analysis to examine which green management practice is the biggest contributor to cost savings. We expected resource conservation would be the biggest contributor to cost savings. Once a hotel implements resource conservation program, the cost savings would be clearly visible. Moreover, resource conservation program is easy to use, so almost all hotels have been implementing it (i.e., 98% of the participating hotels in this study). Surprisingly, however, based on the regression analysis, employee participation turned out to be the biggest contributor to cost savings, showing $\beta = .267$ for cost savings followed by resource conservation and green building management.

4.1 Employee Participation Program

Approximately sixty-five percent of the hotels had been implementing such programs and each hotel had its unique methodology. Interview data we obtained seem to support our theoretical inference. Several hotels held training sessions for managerial level employees on a regular basis, who could then share the information with their subordinates. Specifically, notable comments made by the participating managers in terms of employee participation program are followed by. One manager said that employee participation program has brought much insight and suggestions to the hotel. It has helped the hotel save hundreds of dollars a month or possibly a week. One hotel conducted the environmental training to all staff by showing a video and visiting a waste management company to see the process of waste recycling. One hotel general manager said that an eco-friendly mindset is clearly written in the employee handbook of his hotel. Another hotel had a "Green Team" which consists of various departments to identify, monitor, and manage all significant environmental aspects associated with the operations of the hotel. One general manager said that his hotel has a department called ethics management, to manage or adjust waste management. Another manager said that he believes employee par-

<Table 1> Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Constructs

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Employee Participation	.73	.72	(.639)				
2. Resource Conservation	.93	.93	.187*	(.628)			
3. Green Bldg Mgmta	1.1	.95	.249**	.388**	(.656)		
4. Cost Savings	.76	.87	.312**	.225**	.193*	(.630)	

N = 149 hotels. Cronbach's reliabilities for the scales are shown along the diagonal.

^a Green Bldg Mgmt = Green Building Management.

〈Table 2〉 Employee Participation

	Variables	Values
1	Type	Green committee/team: Sustainable/sustainability committee/program: Employee training: New employee orientation: Contests: Energy action committee: Incentive program: Computer-based training
2	Frequency	Once a week: Every other week: Twice a month: Monthly meeting: No exact time and date
3	Main topics	Use less energy/water: Use environmental products such as environmentally safe cleaners/vacuum systems/non-toxic paint: Use less heat/food/gas: Carbon emission: Recycling
4	Reasons to participate	Increasing motivation/job satisfaction/morale: Increasing productivity: Decreasing costs

ticipation program helps bring awareness to the employees about environmentally friendly work behaviors such as turning off the lights behind them, using glass cups instead of disposable ones, and recycling regularly. At the same hotel, the pictures of little things such as the thermostats are placed in the hotel. These pictures show employees what the optimum temperature is and how to change the thermostat in order to avoid overuse of heat or air. He said, therefore, all of these actions could bring about cost savings. Another manager said that they constantly inform and include their employees in discussion about how they can reduce water, energy, and gas consumption to save the environment and decrease costs.

4.2 The Positive Relationship between Employee Participation and Cost Savings

Several managers directly mentioned the relationship between employee participation and employee productivity or/and job satisfaction. For example, one manager mentioned that being environmentally friendly at the workplace can motivate employees to be more productive, since it makes them feel they are conserving the environment and at the same time becoming healthier by eliminating the use of toxic chemicals and carbon emis-

sions. The hotel also uses environment safe cleaners and vacuum systems as well as non-toxic paint which the employees are very satisfied with. Another comment was stated that the staff is on board with becoming eco-friendly, and that this boosts employee morale and job satisfaction. One general manager who was supportive of employee participation program under green management said that if an employee cares about the environment, that mindset would influence his or her productivity. His statement was a mere conjecture, but it was actually supported by empirical results (Enz and Sigauw, 1999).

4.3 Resource Conservation Program and Green Building Management Program

Previous research has proven that if a hotel has a resource conservation program, that program directly correlates with the hotel's cost savings. This current study also supported this relationship. Water, energy, and other resources conservation was defined as resource conservation in this study. All participating hotels had been implementing waste management including recycling (100%), although the recycling methods are different amongst the hotels. Approximately half of the hotels had recycling departments or green committees operating as a part of the

housekeeping department, the room division, or the engineering department.

Several hotels switched on exit stair walls with alternate wall-lights, used saving-energy light bulbs, or eco-friendly boiling systems. More specifically, one hotel had several promising actions to reduce energy consumption. For example, this hotel replaced all non-decorative lighting with energy saving bulbs. This hotel also had a new, daily electricity consumption report and used key tags to control the lighting and air conditioning systems in rooms. One hotel had an electricity saving program and modification of the gas system in the kitchens as a gas saving system by scheduling to cut electricity and gas. One hotel had an electricity saving program by using timers for the air conditioning system at the back office area. In fact, one general manager said they cut energy consumption by 50 percent with the operation of eco-friendly devices such as eco-friendly light bulbs or wall-lights. By installing a heat-pump system, one hotel reportedly cut energy consumption by 25 percent.

Water conservation systems were not being operated as actively as energy efficiency systems. At least several hotels implemented water recycling systems. One hotel had been installing water saving tools for every shower and wash basin tap. Another hotel had implemented programs such as attaching

water conservation stickers in the locker rooms or installing automatic supply shut-off switched water valves. Water saving posters had been placed in the kitchen and back offices and overflow water recycling systems had been installed at the outdoor swimming pool of one hotel. Even though many hotels did not operate a water conservation system, they alerted their guests by posting water conservation stickers in the guest rooms.

In terms of green building management, since LEED is a U.S.-wide environmental rating and certificate system, most of the Korean managers did not know about LEED. However, following LEED or eco-friendly design has been a required condition in several states in the U.S. [Butler, 2008]. One general manager mentioned that the hotel used environmentally friendly materials for interior finishing work and installed insulation film on exterior wall glass and sunroof glass. He plans for renovation of the hotel laundry based on LEED standards. While approximately half of the managers considered following LEED or eco-friendly design after knowing LEED, most of the opponents of LEED or eco-friendly design were concerned about the costs. Unlike their concerns that eco-friendly design or LEED requires high costs at the beginning, however, one study found that the actual cost may be lower than that of a traditional design (cf. Butler, 2008).

<Table 3> Eco-Friendly Design or LEED

	Variables	Values
1	Benefits	Long-term benefit such as positive effect on the community; Tax reduction from Government; Long-term ROI (save money); More customers from eco-friendly design or LEED; Recognition
2	Reasons no LEED or eco-friendly design	High cost for LEED or even renovation for eco-friendly design; No short-term ROI; Corporate- or owner-decision; the recession; LEED cost → Rooming cost

5. Discussion

Even though the results of this study supported that employee participation in green management has been reported to improve a firm's performance [see also Brío et al., 2002], very little has been known about this relationship. Noteworthy exceptions are some theoretical works including Bauman and Skita's [2012] and Daily and Huang's [2001]. They argued that employees are the key stakeholders who account for the success of the firm as their participation or involvement in green management is critical for the firm's performance.

We tried to consider what made employee participation the biggest contributor to cost savings. First, employees might have voluntarily requested their customers to support their hotel's green management. Or, they might have promoted their green actions to their customers while the customers are staying in the hotel and thus using the hotel's commodities. Either requesting the customers green actions or promoting green practices can be led by the employees who could feel proud of their hotel's environmental care [Bauman and Skita, 2012; Enz and Siguaw, 1999]. Specifically, Bauman and Skita [2012] pointed out that a firm's corporate social responsibility (CSR) including the firm's environmental management can have positive influences on its employees based on theory of needs. They argued a firm's support for CSR including green management increases morality eventually turning to fulfill employees' different needs. Employees can satisfy their need for self-esteem as they can identify themselves as a member of the firm. Such sense of belonging can create the source of pride and value. They also argued that a firm's

meaningful activities such as green management can bring about employee's voluntary prosocial behaviors. Such behaviors could include employees' intentional request for promotion of encouraging participation in green management to their customers.

6. Limitations and Conclusion

There are limitations, even though all of the research hypotheses were supported. First, the results of this study reflect the single source of bias (i.e., the responses from the managers); therefore, the common-method bias could be shared with hotels' cost savings and its antecedents (i.e., employee participation, resource conservation, and green building management). For further research, multiple data need to be obtained from different sources to reduce such common-method biases. Second, the data was collected at a single point in time, not a longitudinal design or serial points such as every three or six months. Employee participation program or green building management program might show better results with time to increase hotels' cost savings.

Despite such limitations, we believe this study will contribute to the base of knowledge regarding green management, especially employee participation program, in the global hotel service industry while it will also provide meaningfully practical guidance to hotel managers. That is, the ultimate objective of this study was to contribute to a better understanding of the role of employee participation in green management and a hotel's performance and, therefore, to inform scholars and hotel practitioners the importance of employee participation in green management. As predicted, employee participation was positively associated with a hotel's cost savings.

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■ Author Profile



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미국 펜실베이니아주립대에서 박사 학위를 취득 후 현재 단국대학교 경영경제대학 국제학부 국제경영전공에서 교수로 재직 중이다. 단국대학교 재직 전에 미국 뉴저지 소재 몽클레어주립대 경영학과에서 재

직하였다(tenured). 연구 주제는 리더십, 조직원들의 감정, 그리고 공감 등이고 국내외 저널 다수에 논문을 발표하였다