The impact of sustainability at the workplace on the employee's motivation and satisfaction

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses on the impact of sustainable efforts at the workplace on employees' motivation and satisfaction. The focus is on the hospitality industry, represented in this case study by the Novotel Amsterdam Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands. As sustainability is becoming increasingly important in today's society, this article investigates the effect of sustainability on hospitality staff. This research is exploratory in nature, with a qualitative approach. Data was collected via eight in-person interviews. Subsequently, the data was analysed with thematic analysis as methodology. Collected data was reduced to the essence of the interviewee's meaning, which allowed for making meaningful conclusions. The study indicated that sustainability is an essential topic for employees and creates a feeling of meaningfulness when sustainable initiatives are implemented in a workplace. Furthermore, the interviewees mentioned that such efforts increase motivation and satisfaction at work. The willingness to be an active part of such strategies was confirmed. This study found that employees see sustainability as a tool for motivation and that it is advantageous for employers to focus on initiatives that are focused on sustainability. Furthermore, the communication of such initiatives should be increased, and employees should also have the chance to be included in the idea finding, planning and implementation of such efforts.

KEYWORDS: employee recognition, hospitality industry, sustainable efforts

Introduction

Sustainability has been a trend in the hospitality industry over the past two decades, according to Sakshi et al. (2020) and Shahzadi et al. (2014). However, these authors believe that this has changed considerably, with sustainability now being seen as a topic of major importance, and that sustainable strategies and implementation can already be found in most full-service hotels across the globe.

As sustainability is experiencing an increased focus of interest in academic research, published literature forms the basis of knowledge for further case-based research. Tschelisnig's (2022) bachelor's dissertation was based on this subject and entitled *Motivation and sustainability — What importance does sustainability have for the motivation and satisfaction of employees at the workplace?*. This article is based on the outcomes of this case-based research. Tschelisnig's research aimed to study the impact of sustainable activities during daily operations on the employees of Novotel Amsterdam Schiphol Airport. Tschelisnig conducted qualitative research in partnership with Novotel Amsterdam Schiphol Airport with a sample of eight front-of-house employees. This case study focuses on the hospitality industry and the impact of its sustainable strategies at the workplace on the employee's motivation and satisfaction.

Literature review

According to Casey and Sieber (2016), employees' awareness in the hospitality industry is changing. Employees pay more attention to the employing company's environmental footprint and want to have meaningful work. On the other hand, more and more academic studies such as Wolf (2012) point out that we as humans exploit planet Earth to such an extent that it is no longer sustainable. Therefore, it would only be logical to combine these two elements to increase employee motivation and engagement and help our planet recover from the exploitation that occurred in the past and is still occurring (Casey & Sieber, 2016).

More and more studies are considering increasing employee engagement to have interested and passionate employees. Wissmann (2013) notes that the world of employment is undergoing a radical transformation. Employees are increasingly questioning the meaning of their work. He also mentions that the companies that do not find answers to employees' concerns would be less attractive for qualified and committed employees. Moreover, Wissmann states that job satisfaction is steadily decreasing and that very few workers feel a strong emotional attachment to their jobs. Raineri et al. (2012) report that the path to more satisfying and meaningful work begins with an environmental and social vision, which is needed to develop a

plan and strategy. After that, responsibilities must be assigned to employees, and they must also be qualified to understand the company's vision. According to Pojasek (2008), people at all levels, from top management to frontline employees, must be involved and aware of social and environmental concerns. It also improves the potential for the recruitment of highly motivated and talented job applicants (MacLean, 2010). It can be seen that sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are positively related to the company's economic results and financial performance (Wolf, 2012).

The issue of sustainability is becoming increasingly important for governments, industry leaders and smaller companies. Bruns-Smith et al. (2015) state that sustainability is considered universal in the hospitality industry. On the other hand, the authors mention that there is still a long way to go to evaluate the industry as "green". For this reason, Cornell University (College of Hotel Administration) (Segarra-Oña et al., 2011) researched sustainable movements based on 100 hotels who were considered to be engaging in the best practices in sustainable achievements. Bader's (2005) research findings show that guests are generally willing to participate in sustainable programmes. Furthermore, the study found an increased willingness to participate when hotels offer small rewards such as loyalty points. On the other hand, guests also expect hotels to provide sustainable programmes that contribute to a greener planet.

The advantage of adopting sustainable innovations (for example, reduced water consumption and reduced waste) is that companies can apply for different sustainability certifications such as ISO 14001 (International Organisation for Standardisation) or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) standards, which according to Segarra-Oña et al. (2011), leads to higher sales and profits than non-certified companies. More and more hotels are replacing their appliances with water-efficient solutions. This includes toilets, showers, washing machines and taps. A study by Alexander (2002) analysed and compared the usage of a hotel on its way to a more sustainable operating hotel and found that the same hotel saved 180 000 gallons of water per year after introducing water-efficient toilets. This lowers water costs and contributes to a sustainable environment. Another method is water-saving notices in the guests' bathrooms reminding them to use less water.

Recycling is a widespread practice because the payback is quick and can lead to significant savings (Bader, 2005). Many hoteliers are reluctant to implement such new interventions as it sometimes requires changes at the operational level. Therefore, according to Radwan et al. (2010), most hoteliers prefer to implement strategies that do not forces changes in the operational processes.

Elkington (1997) describes sustainability as a triple-bottom-line framework where the three pillars of the economy, society and the environment intersect and balance for organisations to create long-term sustainability. A similar model was published by Cavagnaro and Curiel (2012). With this three levels of sustainability framework, the authors illustrate the three dimensions of sustainable development on the societal level: responsible economic growth; equitable social progress; and effective environmental protection. Both frameworks point out that "paying the bills" happens on multiple levels, which means it is essential to consider each pillar or dimension equally to achieve long-term sustainability.

Companies are increasingly focusing on sustainability, and individuals are also noticing the importance of this issue in their daily lives (Illge & Schwarze, 2008). A study by Dickson (2019) addresses the issue of whether and how individuals perceive sustainability, what their opinions are and what influence they have on sustainability. According to Dickson's (2019) study, which focused on respondents in the European region, 93% of participants said they were generally concerned about the environment. This means that concern about this issue and related issues such as sustainability can be considered high among the European population. The study also found that over 40% of millennials are very concerned about the extinction of plant and animal species. On the other hand, 43% of Generation X are apprehensive about plastic pollution in the oceans. For 38% of baby boomers, climate change is the most worrisome issue (Dickson, 2019). In addition, 79% of respondents expect their respective governments to take action on environmental issues to improve the current situation for a greener planet (Dickson, 2019). When participants were asked by Dickson (2019) what their most common environmentally friendly habits were, "recycling when possible" had the highest engagement, with 83.4% of the participants. This was followed by "turn off the water when brushing teeth", with 79.2% engagement, and "turn off the lights when not in the room" with 78.8%. On the other hand, only 28.7% of participants reported avoiding using cleaning products containing chemicals, and only 30.2% reported using public transportation when possible.

According to Illge and Schwarze (2008), 77% of people want to learn how to live more sustainably. His research also shows that the majority of people have an interest in being part of the change. In 2014, the Department of Management Sciences of the University of Bahawalpur in Pakisatan conducted a study on the impact of employee motivation on employee performance. They concluded that their research shows a significant positive relationship between employee motivation and performance (Shahzadi et al., 2014). In addition, they describe that employee motivation is considered a force that drives employees to achieve specific goals and objectives of the organisation, which is also fundamental to organisations and their performance.

Azar & Shafighi (2013) note that the main task of a manager is to classify and control employees to maximise the business result. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that managers can motivate their employees. There are multiple ways to motivate employees, but the reward management system is one of the best known. According to Barber and Bretz (2000), it helps attract, capture, retain and motivate high-potential employees and, in turn, achieves high-performance levels. This system is based on two pillars, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, which are two different employee incentives.

The extrinsic reward includes financial rewards (salary, bonuses, etc.). In contrast, the intrinsic rewards include non-financial rewards such as recognition, security, title, promotion, appreciation, praise, involvement in decision-making, social impact, flexible working hours, comfort at work, feedback, job design, social rights, etc. (Yang, 2008).

According to Kuvaas and Dysvik (2009), employees with a high motivation score also have a deeper connection with their work and are more willing to accept tasks with higher responsibility. Their study also mentions that intrinsic rewards are becoming more important in today's society. This means that employees are not only motivated by higher salaries, but increasingly by

rewards such as social impact, appreciation and participation in decision-making.

In summary, two main things motivate employees — extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. While the first focuses more on salary and grades, the second deals with employee satisfaction and enjoyment at work, including social impact, appreciation, participation in decision-making, etc. In recent years, intrinsic rewards have become increasingly important to employees and their motivation, suggesting that employees want to take pride in what they do and see actual results. This is particularly interesting in the promotion of favourable, sustainable behaviour of employees working in the hospitality industry.

Methodology

This research followed a qualitative design focusing on the Novotel Amsterdam Schiphol Airport employees' opinions, stories and experiences. Therefore, eight semi-structured interviews in English were conducted with eight front-of-house Novotel Amsterdam Schiphol Airport employees and qualitative data were gathered and analysed using thematic analyses. The eight participants were chosen from a population of 60 employees with at least five months of work experience at Novotel Amsterdam Schiphol Airport. By judgmental sampling, participants who had direct guest contact (and therefore could see the reaction of the customers towards the sustainable strategies) were selected. The interviewees represented the front office, duty management and food and beverages departments. Saturation was reached after eight interviews.

Findings

This article deals with the topic of employees' personal opinions about sustainability, the employees' knowledge and opinion about sustainability, the importance of sustainability in the employees' leisure time and the sustainable efforts and importance of sustainability in the employees' leisure time. Finally, the importance of the employer's efforts towards sustainability in connection with the recruitment process of future employees was analysed. The topic "The impact of sustainability at the workplace on the employee's motivation and satisfaction" is discussed in three sub-sections. The discussion provides insight into the influence of sustainable activities on motivation and satisfaction, the influence of sustainable actions on the meaningfulness of the job and the willingness to be part of sustainable strategies.

Influence of sustainable activities on motivation and satisfaction
Since the hotel calls itself a sustainable hotel, employees have experienced its work environment under self-identified sustainable conditions. Based on the thematic analysis, the following quotes reflect the employees' daily contact with sustainable strategies and the impact on their motivation. The data is collected from the interview question, "What impact does sustainability at the workplace have on your overall motivation?".

I am definitely more motivated to sell our sustainable products. Because, you see, when people are buying a bottle of water, you ask more, as we do have reusable models and you can use that, and that's more sustainable, and you help others with searching for...

better things to sell for the planet. You do want to sell the sustainable stuff like water bottles. (Interview 8.1)

Definitely. We even get a report about the amount of water and how many people we helped with that. This really motivates me. It is really a cool project, I think. (Interview 8.2)

It's a big thing when I actually have the feeling that my company is contributing to a greener planet. I do also see some, maybe not greenwashing, but surface-level sustainability in our hotel, which is not a bad thing. It's a step. But I do think there's a lot more improvement to be done. There is still single-use plastic in the hotel rooms. There is still a lot of paper used in offices. There is still a lot of food waste and water waste all over the hotel, but I think we are on the right path. It motivates me that I could also have an impact, such as a water system suggestion, or a new SOP for the kitchen. They just implemented a food waste processor to recycle food waste into energy. It's such a cool concept, and I wish that it were more known throughout industries. But we are on the right path, and it does motivate me that the company is trying its best. (Interview 8.4)

It's something that's important for a company. It's something that's important for an individual, but it's not really something that is important for me when I'm looking for an employer. (Interview 8.6)

If you really believe in what you're doing, and if you believe that you are counted as a part of these communities, and a part of this environment, you really feel motivated. And as I told you, you need to have something inside you to have this to start saving, I could follow the company programmes and their procedures and their last, but if I don't care, I could also waste a lot of paper. I'm working most of the time by myself. So it's all about trust, you know, about believing what you're doing." (Interview 8.8)

Seven of the eight respondents felt that Novotel Amsterdam Schiphol Airport's sustainable efforts positively impacted their motivation. In addition, three of the respondents stated that they are more motivated and committed to selling sustainable options than other options, which also positively impacts the employer. Another aspect is identification with the employer. It was mentioned that employees are proud to work for Novotel Amsterdam Schiphol Airport and share the history and commitment with the guests.

It can be concluded that sustainability plays an important role in employee motivation and that sustainable efforts in the workplace positively influence motivation and increase the effort to communicate these initiatives to the guest.

Influence of sustainable activities on the meaningfulness of the job
As identified in the literature review, the meaningfulness of a job is becoming increasingly important to employees. Therefore, the eight respondents were asked about their opinion on this topic. The results of what is important for them and what they consider meaningful can be found in the form of quotes below.

Based on the thematic analysis, the following quotes reflect the interview question, "How do sustainable efforts at the workplace influence the meaningfulness of your job?".

I do like a hotel that doesn't think only about themselves, but also for the environment and also the whole world, and being sustainable. That's what I really like about this hotel. (Interview 7.1)

For me, it's very meaningful to work in a team. And I also would like to create a team in my function. I know I can keep the group together, keep the people inside of the hotel, listen to them, work with them and make them better. For me, this is meaningful. (Interview 7.2)

I work in a hotel kitchen. The last thing I want to do is charity work. Yeah, I work in a hotel kitchen because I like cooking meaningfully. My job doesn't entail a lot of meaningfulness, for me it is that people like the food that I make. This is all the meaning that I need in my work. (Interview 7.6)

All in all, it can be stated that meaningfulness at work has many different sides and can address a large number of activities. As mentioned in the previous topic, the respective teams in which an employee is employed plays a significant role for the respondents from Novotel Amsterdam Schiphol Airport. Meaningfulness in terms of the team means positively impacting team performance and creating a well-functioning team atmosphere where everyone can develop their potential in a protected environment.

In addition, only one respondent combined the word "meaningfulness" with "sustainability", showing that the most critical aspects for the respondents are not external but internal, in that they can contribute to the overall product and service. Only one respondent did not see much meaningfulness in their work. However, he focused the meaningfulness of his work on the customer because they like his food.

Willingness to be part of sustainable strategies
It has already been explored that the respondents believe that sustainability is a motivating factor and that all of them are actively involved in at least one sustainable strategy in the hotel. The question is whether the respondents would also be willing to take more initiative to make the hotel more environmentally friendly. This also involves whether employees would like to be part of the thinking and implementation processes to see the full impact of their work on sustainability.

Based on the thematic analysis, the following quotes reflect the interview question, "How would you actively describe your willingness to participate in sustainable strategies?'. Data from respondents' answers were compared to identify patterns in their opinions.

It would be nice to be more involved in these initiatives because you have an impact on people and more of an impact on things, but I'm not sure if I would like that. Because it is more work, and I don't know if you can reach many people with it. Because people are also thinking, "Oh, whatever". (Interview 10.1)

I really think it's important. And I think I will be very glad to help and to make this hotel even more sustainable. I think I really want to be part of it. And if there are

some extra things I can do for the hotel, or some extra ideas I can come up with, I will be very glad to help this hotel, and I would be more than happy to help. (Interview 10.3)

For helping in doing things better, then I'm always going to be a part of this, of course. Because it is not only about them, it's only about myself, they're also teaching me how to do things. (Interview 10.5)

But I think I would be really interested, often have new ideas, I would be more open, I would be more creative when it comes to saving and following these strategies. (Interview 10.8)

It can be concluded that the interest in being a part of new sustainable strategies is present, and the respondents would also find it motivating to be part of developing sustainable strategies. Two of the respondents mentioned that they have concerns about the amount of time they have to spend on such activities, which could lead to neglecting their assigned work and tasks.

Nevertheless, respondents are open to participating in such processes and show an increased interest in steps that do not only involve implementing sustainable strategies. This suggests that the willingness to participate in such strategies is high and is also in the interests of the employees surveyed.

Discussion

Raineri et al. (2012) reported that the path to more satisfying and meaningful work begins with an environmental and social vision, which is needed as a guideline for developing a plan and strategy. As the Novotel Amsterdam Schiphol Airport is considered a sustainable employer, the interviewees were able to consider this thought. The outcome of the interviews showed that sustainability is an essential factor for the majority of the participants when it comes to motivation and satisfaction. Seven of the eight interviewees mentioned that sustainability in the workplace increases their motivation and satisfaction since these employees have a feeling of being meaningful at work. This is also confirmed by a study by Pojasek (2008). He mentioned that the result of sustainable strategies is that current employees show higher motivation, satisfaction and commitment to their work and employer.

Furthermore, according to Casey and Sieber (2016), there is a change in thinking in the industry. Employees are paying more attention to the environmental footprint of the company they work for, and they want to have meaningful work. This corresponds with the findings of this research, as employees mentioned that sustainability is an important factor at work and gives them a feeling of meaningfulness.

Another outcome of the research is the interest of the employees to be part of sustainable strategies and that the motivation to be included more in creating such processes can be improved from the employer's side. This is also in line with the study by Pojasek (2008), who mentioned that sustainability increases employee engagement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, sustainability can be seen as a factor for greater employee motivation and satisfaction, with its most significant impact being when it is communicated well to all employees of the hotel. When this is the case, employees have an increased feeling of meaningfulness in connection with their work and a more substantial commitment to their work and employer.

Furthermore, there is also considerable motivation to participate in such strategies, as respondents indicated that they would like to be more involved in such processes and also participate in the creation of these initiatives. The willingness to present these sustainable efforts to customers is also high, leading to an increase in motivation to sell sustainable products. Sustainability in the workplace is essential for the employees who work there, including the management and future employees.

Recommendations

The study indicated that sustainability is an important topic for employees and that it creates a feeling of meaningfulness when such initiatives are implemented at their workplace. Furthermore, the interviewees mentioned that sustainable efforts increase their motivation and satisfaction at work. The willingness to be actively part of sustainable strategies is confirmed.

Employees, guests and business partners should be informed about sustainable efforts. This includes the range of sustainable initiatives and the outcome of these efforts (numbers, facts, etc.), which will lead to a greater understanding of the matter. However, this information needs to be updated regularly to create a bond between the employees and the sustainable efforts.

The participation of employees in the creation of sustainable initiatives needs to be improved. To create a better commitment to the work and execution of sustainable strategies, it is important that the employees also have the possibility to shape these initiatives with their opinions and suggestions. Employers need to keep track of the sustainable movements in their industry to guarantee maximum efficiency and obtain the most outstanding results for eco-friendliness, employee motivation, cost reductions and marketing benefits.

Sustainable initiatives need to be taken with an inclusive approach. An approach to sustainability should not be pushed by management, or driven by achievable standards. Instead, support and input should be sought among employees. This study showed that employees are predominantly positively motivated when a stakeholder in sustainable initiatives.

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