

Summer 8-17-2020

Sustainable Housekeeping programs in the hotel industry beneficial or cause for concern?

Clint Smith

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.jwu.edu/hosp_graduate



Part of the [Hospitality Administration and Management Commons](#)

Are Sustainable Housekeeping programs in the Hotel Industry beneficial or cause for concern?

Clint Smith

Johnson & Wales University

HOSP6900: Hospitality Capstone

Professor Dr. Paul Howe

Table of Contents

Abstract.....3

Introduction.....4

Literature review.....6

Methodology.....9

Analysis of findings.....9

Conclusion.....10

References.....12

Abstract

This review paper looks at sustainability programs in the hospitality industry with a focus on the housekeeping departments in hotels. The traditional operations of some aspects of the housekeeping department would have a negative impact on the environment due to the amount of toxins in the chemical that they use to clean the rooms, the affect that those chemicals would have on staff and guest and also the amount of waste water that is created by the laundry. The programs that have been adopted by a number of hotels have reduced the use of toxic chemicals and also reduced the amount of waste water that is created. With the successful implementation of such programs the hotels benefits by the reduced cost of cleaning materials and lower usage of water, while at the same time creating a safer environment for both staff and guests. The paper will also look at how these sustainability programs are viewed by staff and guests. Also highlighted in this paper is that the implementation of sustainability programs in the hospitality industry specifically housekeeping departments are readily welcomed and accepted by most, however research shows that there were some who expressed that these programs have a negative impact on the wellbeing of both guest and staff.

Keywords

Sustainability programs; housekeeping in hotels; green hotels; green initiatives; nontoxic chemicals

Introduction

Sustainable housekeeping programs have become more prevalent in recent times as the hotel and lodging industry seek to promote green awareness which would have a positive impact on guests, staff and the environment. The term *going green* has been around for some time and is a call for everyone to play their part in reducing their carbon footprint so as to prolong the existence of the earth as we know it. The Kyoto Protocol is a campaign that was started back in the 90's where businesses, cities and countries on a whole were called upon to engage in sustainable programs that will reduce the amount of pollutants that is being released into the environment and adapting ways to reduce, reuse and recycle our natural resources. It was adopted in Japan in 1997 and became law in 2005. (Tard.2019) The hospitality and tourism industry is a huge sector of the world's economy today and this paper will show the type of impact the effective adoption of such sustainability programs can have on the preservation of the environment. The hotel and lodging sector in numerous countries accounts for the consumption of the most energy (electricity) and water and also produces the most waste.

There are different internationally recognized certification systems that hotels and lodging businesses are pursuing in order to stay competitive or gain a competitive advantage on their rivals. These include but not limited to Green Globe Certification which is a structural assessment of the sustainability performance of travel and tourism business and also Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) which is an internationally recognized green building certification system that provides verification that a building or community was designed and built using strategies aimed at improving performance on energy saving, water efficiency carbon emissions reduction.

There are studies which have indicated that the housekeeping department and the role they play in the sustainability efforts of the hospitality industry have has a positive effect on the environment and also their respective hotel's bottom line. In an article by Selwitz (2011) the director of rooms and operations of a Hyatt hotel in North America claims that "being known for green operations keeps us ahead of the curve when customers choose a hotel." In another article by O'Conner (2020) the Sustainability coordinator of Hotel Drisco says that the distinct benefits from using sustainable products in the hotel's housekeeping process such as healthier workers, fewer complaints from sensitive guests, cleaner and more sanitary rooms as well as lower housekeeping overhead. There are a number of different sustainability programs that have been adopted and implemented over the years some of which have become very popular due to their effectiveness which will be highlighted a bit later With that being said there may be some cause for concern as there are housekeepers who have not happily accepted these new programs as the implementation have made their jobs harder and in some instances may require them working reduced hours. These are some of areas that will be looked at as we examine the impact the sustainability programs have on the hospitality industry and the environment.

Literature Review

The articles reviewed to prepare this paper were from operators of hotels, resorts and different lodging businesses where a number of sustainability programs that housekeeping departments adopted such as the use of nontoxic cleaning chemicals, linen reuse programs and the option to refuse service in exchange for credits were all used in their quest to protect the environment while at the same time satisfying guest and reducing cost.

One of the more popular programs that were used is the linen and towel reuse program. Traditionally, the bed linen and towels in a guest room were changed every day. This meant that they had to be laundered daily. That frequency of washing would damage the linen and shorten their life span hence incurring additional cost to replace the linen. Also, this would account for a large some of water being used daily to wash the linen, which increases the amount of waste water created that could cause harm to the environment due to the chemicals that it contained. The linen and towel reuse program allows the guest to indicate when they would like to have their bed linen and towels changed.

There is also another version where the guests are notified that the linens and towels would be changed on a schedule (e.g., every other day) this is normally indicated with guest room collateral. It was also noted that by using environmentally friendly laundry detergents the laundry facilities can operate with lower temperature and use less water. In one article it says “If you’re not washing towels and bedding, you’re saving water and money. You’re also not sending as many chemicals into the sewer system” (Ellin 2018) The less water being used to wash linen daily, the less waste water there would be to release into the environment. “Water maintenance is a necessary step taken by hotels to control and minimize waste”(Furkey .2014). If guests request

to have their linen and towels changed daily the housekeeping department will honour their request however one hospitality Group president noted that “people are surprisingly receptive to reusing these items” he added “demand for daily replacement is definitely declining”(Selwitz. 2011).

Another sustainable program that was identified while reviewing different articles was that hotels were shifting from the traditional cleaning chemicals used to clean guest rooms to 100% nontoxic chemicals. These chemicals are not only safe for staff use but also for guests. In one article it states that “hotel companies that have made the change to citrus-based products have found that they are just as effective, are cost-effective and that respiratory issues and dry hands have also been eliminated, resulting in less absenteeism”(HB, 2008). The housekeeping department at the Hotel Drisco in San Francisco took the use of, chemical-free disinfectant a step further by installing a Tersano ionized- water system for 100 percent chemical free disinfectant that is hypoallergenic while being very gentle. “We want to ensure that a product used in our hotel will be safe for guests of all ages and sensitivities, for housekeepers who work with these supplies each day, and are absolutely effective at cleaning” (O'Connor, 2020). At the Hyatt at Olive 8 in Seattle, the housekeeping department uses Green Seal approved low VOC (volatile organic compounds) cleaners and offer 100% toxin free dry cleaning services (Elyssa. 2019).

While researching, it was noted that there are some new sustainability programs that are trending in the hospitality industry today where daily housekeeping is concerned. One of which being hotels that are giving guests the option to forgo housekeeping services in exchange for food and beverage credit and in some cases reward points. Starwood launched its initiative at the Sheraton Seattle in 2008. Guest who declined housekeeping service for up to three consecutive days received a choice of either 500 Starpoints or a \$5 food & beverage gift card.

There was one summer at Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas where guest were given a chance to decline having their room cleaned in exchange for a voucher (Ellin, 2018). There are a lot of travellers today especially business travellers who will gladly accept the voucher since they would hardly be in their rooms and also, they may only be there for two or three nights.

There are other programs that have been introduced in some establishments such as the use of bulk shampoo, conditioners and body wash containers are used in the guest bathrooms. These would be cleaned and refilled as needed while the room is occupied and again when the room is being prepared to welcome a new guest. The use of these large containers replaces the smaller one-use containers which will reduce the amount of waste that is sent to the landfill.

In a research by Brody in 2014, a study that was conducted in Starwood hotels in Hawaii, a program called “Make a Green Choice” housekeepers revealed that while the sustainability programs were good for saving on energy consumption and waste reduction they were not only the cause of reduced hours for housekeepers but in their view it also hindered the delivery of caring. Some issues that housekeepers are faced with due to the implementation of these sustainability programs are unsanitary conditions of the rooms that are not being cleaned regularly and in some instance loss of work resulting from lack of rooms to clean. “If they could not clean the room and the room became in their estimation unsanitary, their positive perception of their work quickly became negative.” (Brody, 2014) They also expressed that each day the room was not cleaned the more dirt and mold will build up so that after the third day when the room has to be cleaned it was filthy and required a lot more time to have it ready. The housekeepers no longer knew in advance their room cleaning schedule as there was the possibility that a number of rooms may opt out for service. Ordinarily, a housekeeper would be scheduled to clean a set of rooms in the same building on the same floor, now they may be

scheduled to clean rooms in multiple buildings and on different floors. This could interrupt the flow of timely service for the rooms that requested service. Also if a room that opted out for service asked for towels and to have the trash removed they cannot be refused, however the housekeeper will not get the credit for providing that service to the room. The housekeepers claimed that the implementation of the sustainability programs led to reduced work hours which meant a reduction in pay and more time and effort exerted to maintain the integrity of the rooms.

Methodology

This research seeks to identify the type of impact on the guest, staff and the environment that the introduction of sustainability programs in the housekeeping departments has on hotel and lodging businesses in the hospitality industry. This will be accomplished by the use of secondary qualitative data which was obtained from articles, peer review papers and journals that were obtained from online databases that conducted similar researches. The rationale for using these methods to obtain the information was due to time constraints which would not allow conducting a primary study and also with the use of secondary data the information would not be limited to a particular area.

Analysis

Based on the information that was reviewed, the introduction of sustainable housekeeping programs in the hotel and lodging industry, for the most part has a positive impact on the staff, guest and the environment. This is supported by Selwitz 2011 who spoke of the use of green cleaning products in hotels, and also by O'Conner 2020, who mentioned the effective use of non-toxic cleaning products in hotels. The use of citrus based and non-toxic cleaning chemicals are now being used more widely in the hospitality industry as they are just as effective

as the traditional products but is more user friendly for staff and more pleasant for the guest. The option to decline housekeeping services could be regarded as a win-win for both guest and hoteliers as some guests don't care to be bothered while on vacation and the hotel will save on resources. Travellers today have grown to embrace sustainability programs as such and they consider participating in these programs as them playing their part in preserving the environment.

Most of the articles that were reviewed while researching the topic of sustainable housekeeping programs indicated that these programs had a positive impact on both staff and guest at the hotel and also in the environment, there were a few where the implementation of these programs were seen in a negative light. This was due to the fact that housekeepers saw the introduction of these programs led to less working hours and they would have to work twice as hard to clean a room that didn't have service for two days. In this case, before implementing the programs a few factors should have been considered, such as the size of the property and the layout of the rooms. The location of the property and culture of the people should also be considered as programs that may work well in one area may not be readily accepted in another.

Conclusion

It is evident that green initiatives will continue to grow in popularity in the hospitality and the travellers today are more conscious on making their contribution to preserving our environment. Hotels will also seek to implement these programs as the most of which are not only cost effective that will positively impact their bottom line but also would like to be named among the properties that are participating in green initiatives which can be used as a marketing tool for attracting travellers who considers such initiatives as a criteria when selecting a lodging

establishment to visit. In an article by Hotel Business in an issue published in 2008 mentioned how the use of environmentally friendly detergents combined with water saving fixtures, hotels could see a reduction of up to 25% in utility bills. While the implementation of these sustainability programs benefits the guests, the environment and for the most part housekeeping staff, further studies needs to be carried out to investigate the work life balance of the staff.

It was noted in one research that while the guest were pleased to participate in the green programs their participation had a negative impact on the health and livelihood of the housekeeping staff. These studies should look at the increase or decrease of workload and also the potential reduction of salary due to fewer rooms that needed to be cleaned. The hotel should consider the human resource as its most valuable asset and should ensure that they are not at a disadvantage. They should ensure that they strike the balance in the implementation of the green initiatives and employee and guest's satisfaction.

References

- Brody, D (2014) Go Green: Hotels, Design and the Sustainability Paradox. *Design Issues*.
- Ellin, A (2018) When Housekeeping Knocks, What Will You Say? *The New York Times*.
- Elyssa, A (2019) LEED is the first step for sustainability. *Hotel Business* Vol.28 Issue 7 P42
- Furkey, L(2014) Connect among Green, Sustainability and Hotel Industry: A prospective Simulation Study. *International Journal of Social, Behavioural, Educational, Economic Busniess and Indusrtial Engineering*.
- Hotel Business (2008) Sustainability: Sustainability can be reached at luxury level with little impact to guest
- O'Connor, S (2020) Sustainability takes center stage at housekeeping level. *Hotel Management.Net*.
- Selwitz, R. (2011) Green cleaning benefits spread throughout the hotel *Hotel Management* (21582122, Vol. 226 Issue 4, p32-32. 2/3p
- Tard. C. (2019) The Kyoto Protocol. Retrieved investopedia.com/terms/k/Kyoto.asp