Sustainable development practices in Malaysian hotel: A case of the Palace Hotel
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ABSTRACT – This paper discusses how the hotel’s operation to improve its environmental performance through the implementation of sustainable development practices as its respective business model. A single case study and in-depth literature review were employed as the research design approach. Four key data collection methods were used: (1) Primary data from official company websites, (2) Primary data from hand on observation, (3) Primary data from the General Manager via Table Talk Discussions, and (4) Secondary data from documents (i.e. Newspaper and magazines). With the use of thematic analysis of the evidence practices, the paper reveals that there are seven key sustainable development practices implemented in the Palace Hotel to cut down the running cost while improving their social-environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The business environment becomes fuzzy with unclear interrelations and an overlap between the player and the roles. Clearly, the world is changing so fast with new trends emerging. Inevitably, it is becoming clear that sustainable development has been the center of growing trends and awareness of the global links between the issues of environmental, economic and social responsibility. According to the report of the Development and International Co-operation: Environment - Annex to the document A/42/427, “sustainability is to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This concept has taken increased importance in the world today as corporations continue to seek to maximize profits while constrained by the earth’s limited resources. As this is seconded by several literature studies which proposed the importance of sustainable development context, such as [1-5]. Likewise, developing sustainability will help firms to generate value that enhances profitability and gain competitive advantage.

Looking from a bigger picture this sustainable development “mantra” is closely linked to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) where it is the 2030 core agenda on sustainable development which was agreed by the world leader on 25 September 2015 at the United Nations Conference. SDG is continuing to develop an agenda after the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) end in 2015. MDGs consist of 8 Goals and 21 Targets. While SDG was expanded to 17 Goals and 169 Targets which continue the goals to achieve the 2030 agenda instability in three dimensions of sustainable development, namely social, economy and environment [6].

In line with the objective of sustainable development, Ban Ki-Moon clustered Sustainable Development Goals into six “essential elements”: dignity, prosperity, justice, partnership, planet, and people [7]. This approach enforces the firms to engage in activities that positively affect the environment and society besides gaining economic performance.

In Malaysia, a number of studies have focused on accessing the sustainable development issues such as [8-11]. However, the focus of these studies was to assess the application of the sustainable development agenda in the context of ecotourism, entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility and brand image. Some other studies such as [12,13] focused on assessing the sustainable development merely on the perspective of policy matters. While, [14-16] focused on sustainable development in manufacturing industry and others such as [8, 17, 18] highlighted on sustainable development link to renewable energy in Malaysia. Whereas [19-22] evaluated the impact of sustainable development in public sectors itself.

It indicates that the majority of studies have been conducted to measure or validate sustainable development from customers’ perspectives only without much attention given to examining this concept from managers’ perspectives. In addition, examining the managers’ perspectives (i.e. Service providers) of sustainable development has been recommended by many recent studies, for example [23-27].

All of the above literature suggests that there is an ample amount of literature review on sustainable development, the majority of studies have been conducted to measure or eliciting the view of sustainable development from customers’ perspectives without much attention given to examining this concept from managers’ and employees’ perspectives (i.e. Service providers). Consequently, based on relevant sustainable development review, this article contributes to the sustainable development literature by fulfilling the following gap:

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“There are very few studies in the field of sustainable development that have been conducted to identify any sustainable development practices in Malaysian service sector, particularly in the hotel industry and to recommend the best practices implemented from the managers’ perspectives”.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper is an exploratory qualitative study. A systematic approach to literature review is based on the knowledge that gives a major role in evidence-based practices [28] was adopted in this research. Process in getting literature review that has been conducted include sustainable development in general, as well as ‘green practices’, specifically in Malaysia. In this paper, we use the term ‘sustainable development’ and ‘green practices’ as inclusive generated terms. The researchers have adopted a single case study approach in order to illustrate how this phenomenon – the characteristics are applied to the real-world context.

Thus, the qualitative approach allows researchers to collect in-depth data to explore the topic without the need to collect numerical data [29]. The main reason for choosing this approach as our research design over a quantitative approach because it is more appropriate. Based on the objectives of our study, we want to identify the sustainable practices in Malaysian service sector, particularly in the hotel industry.

As a result, researchers chose The Palace Hotel, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia as it is very different, and researchers wanted to explore what is happening in this part of the world. It is clear that The Palace Hotel is one of the alternative ways of work - as The Palace Hotel is one of the companies that can fit well with the sustainable development model. The Palace Hotel devotes a significant amount of time and resources into fostering a healthy ecosystem for communities that promote the environmental commitment and innovation in sustainable practices and community outreach programs. Therefore, the key reason for selecting The Palace Hotel is based on the premise that they operate successfully in the sustainable development context, fulfilling the criterion purpose and providing the exceptional case. As a result, in conducting this research, the authors have accessed the official company’s documentation. Following on from that, the researchers were fortunate to have a talk session presented by The Palace Hotel’s General Manager, Ms. Phang Joo See during the visit to the hotel. The aim of doing this Table Talk Discussion was to enrich the information regarding the hotel value and practices, as this allowed the researchers to better understand what people are thinking and saying.

Interviews can be conducted in many ways, such as face-to-face interviews or using electronic mediums, such as telephone or using internet or video call [30]. Our interviews are conducted through table talk discussion and conversations are documented. The write-up or document later can be read, edited for accuracy, commented, coded and analysed, as we follow the work of [31].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, four key data collection methods were used: (1) Primary data from official company websites, (2) Primary data from hand on observation, (3) Primary data from the General Manager via Table Talk Discussions, and (4) Secondary data from documents (i.e. Newspaper and magazines). Due to the nature of the study, we are explaining our data based on our observation, discussion with the Hotel’s General Manager, the Hotel’s printed documents as well as the interpretation we got from the official company website. The data are then analysed using thematic analysis. In the thematic analysis, we try to recognize patterns and responses. Thematising is a process of regrouping various answers and responses into a few smaller themes and naming them based on previous studies that addressed the issue of study [32].

With the use of thematic analysis of the evidence practices, the paper reveals that there are seven key “sustainability innovation” practices implemented in the Palace Hotel to cut down the running cost while improving their social-environmental.

The seven key factors of sustainable development approaches and green practices in The Palace Hotel, which merit further analysis, namely, green campaign; reuse and recycle of waste – The 4R activity; sustainable food dining; biodiversity conservation; water system technology; energy saving; and hazardous material free.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The researchers have illustrated and discussed the phenomena of specific topics namely; green campaign, reuse and recycle of waste – The 4R activity, sustainable food dining, biodiversity conservation, water system technology, energy saving, and hazardous material free in The Palace Hotel. In doing that, this enabled the researchers to portray the overall picture of The Palace Hotel context and how The Palace Hotel is aligned and connected to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) context, which is illustrated earlier in the literature review section. In turn, the researchers compare the findings from The Palace Hotel case against these SDG. As a result, service management and sustainable development practices might get high impact for the best performance assessment in which it is addressed in various ways, particularly there are very few studies in the area of service and sustainable development that have been conducted to identify any sustainability innovation practices in Malaysian service sector, specifically in the hotel industry and to recommend the best practices implemented from the managers’ perspectives. Finally, for scholars, this paper can enhance their understanding of service and sustainable development as well as highlight opportunities for further research.

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