



# Impeding factors hindering the implementation of green management initiatives in hotels: A developing country perspective

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## Abstract

There is a massive number of activities that exert a significant impact on global resources which emanate from hotel operations. These include high consumption of water, high demand of energy used in an effort to make the guests comfortable as well as the production of large quantities waste. Despite the several studies conducted globally in the field of tourism on environmental management and organisations' commitment to going green in the tourism industry in developing countries, there has been limited discussion of problems facing hotels implementing green management initiatives. This paper sought to establish impeding factors facing hotels implementing green management initiatives. In this study, which adopted the multiple case approach it was established that there is a considerable number of problems prohibiting implementation of sustainable green management initiatives. This study made a significant contribution to literature in that regard. The study revealed that people employed in the hospitality industry are not finding it easy to embrace green management initiatives. This is due to resistance from people employed in the hospitality industry as green management was relatively a new phenomenon only recently introduced. The study also established that it is specifically the hotel managers' who lack ideas on how to go green and how to make life healthier within the tourism environment. The study furthermore revealed that one of the main challenges is affordability of the green management initiatives, for instance where construction of the hotel was conducted a few years ago when builders were not essentially concerned with green building.

**Keywords:** Hotels, green management, sustainable green management.

## Introduction

As a critical component of hospitality industry, hotel operations are characterised by a massive number of activities that exert a significant impact on global resources (Kirk, 1995:3). From an environmental perspective, hotels stand out among other commercial buildings due to their high consumption of water as well as the production of large quantities of waste and indoor air quality problems (Kasim, 2006:4; Bohadanowicz, Zientara & Novotna, 2011:801). Furthermore, the physical comfort of guests in hotels depends largely on heating, ventilating, air conditioning and laundry, which increase the demand on energy supply (Verginis & Wood, 1999:132). In some instances, hotel construction often has a negative ecological impact, as there is disruption of wetlands and habitats for genetic diversity, resulting in the extinction of species (Gossling, 2011:7). It is often the case that employees in the hospitality sector are exposed to occupational health hazards such as pollutants from fossil fuels used to supplement energy needs requirements in hotels, and this could result in high incidence of work-related diseases and deaths (Gossling, 2011:7). Accordingly, concern for the natural



environment would be expressed in environmentally friendly business practices and an obligation by hotels to use resources responsibly (Jonker & De-Witte, 2006:1). Examples of green environmental initiatives in hotels include the use of renewable energy technologies, energy saving devices such as light sensors and key card light switches, water saving devices and recycling schemes (Font, Tapper, Schwartz & Kornilaki, 2008:264). Implementing appropriate green management processes lead to reduced resource consumption and improved quality of the environment in which hoteliers operate. Moreover, Brebbia and Pineda (2004:3) note that financial savings are one of the most significant factors that influence implementation of environmental initiatives, particularly in high competitive markets where the cost of energy, water, and waste disposal are high. However, there are some challenges facing hotels implementing green initiatives in an attempt to minimise the environmental impact of their operations (Font, Tapper, Schwartz & Kornilaki, 2008:264). Presently, there is inconsistency in development and implementation of environmentally friendly practices which is a cause of concern. Such inconsistency is attributed to failure by managers to fully understand or grasp what the concept of green management is. In Zimbabwe and South Africa there is excessive use of water and electricity. There is also a rapid increase in the production of solid waste resulting in both land and air pollution increases.

This study is of great importance in the aforesaid two developing countries as there was need to ascertain whether there are some impediments to implementation of sustainable green management initiatives in them. Sustainability is about avoiding sacrificing the future for our current needs. The principle of sustainability is mainly about working in a way that prevents the organisations' negative impacts on the environment (Brackley, 2007:40). The depletion of non-renewable resources should require comparable development of renewable substitutes for that resource. For renewable resources, the rate of harvest should not exceed the rate of regeneration. Moreover, the rate of waste generation from projects should not exceed the assimilative capacity or sustainable waste disposal (Daly, 1990:4). Although it should be noted that some hoteliers claim that they have implemented some eco-friendly initiatives in these two countries. It is a cause of concern, that numerous hotels have relatively scanty awareness of sustainable green management in these developing countries. This suggests that there are some barriers and obstacles with regard to the effective implementation of sustainable environmentally friendly initiatives in hotels (Mbasera, 2014:119).

## **Literature review**

### **Benefits of implementing green management initiatives in hotels**

Tourism relies on the quality of the environment for its survival, and hence needs to play an active role in environmental preservation (Tzischentke, Kirk & Lynch, 2009). Hospitality organisations of which hotels are part, are now being forced to take responsibility for the impact their operations have on the environment. There is evidence in today's literature to suggest that the implementation of environmental practices in the tourism and hospitality industry has benefits that are infinite. An important concept behind efforts to reduce damage to the environment is 'sustainability'. Pizam (2009) is of the view that many hospitality organisations are not interested in environmental protection for sustainability or for ethical reasons, but are purely investing in environmental practices for selfish, profitable reasons. Through environmentally-friendly certification, the hotel tries to achieve consistency in managing the environment. In addition to this, certification makes a hotel internationally acclaimed as a hospitality provider.

Environmentally friendly practices boost confidence in guests and patrons and strengthens the organisation in the face of competition and in addition, an eco-friendly hotel has the chance of gaining a strategic competitive advantage (Park, Kim & McCleary, 2014:110). By implication, the hotel that has environmentally-friendly certification maintains standards through following the guidelines and it receives international recognition. In addition,



employees know what is expected of them in terms of environmental issues. By implication, when customers are attracted to the hotel that has been certified by a well accredited certification organisation, the hotel propels upwards in business, thus placing the company at a competitive advantage over its uncertified counterparts. Implications for uncertified hotels are that there is need for training on the importance of environmentally friendly certification and the benefits that come by it.

### **Challenges in implementing green initiatives in hotels**

All sectors of the tourism industry have attempted, over the years, to incorporate environmentally friendly practices in its various segments of the economy (Jackson, 2010:214). As such, environmental awareness and concern for providing environmentally friendly products and services have caused hoteliers to recognise that their personal decisions of production of goods and services have the power to affect environmental change (Miller *et al.*, 2012:396). In addition to that, the customers who are interested in purchasing green products or services such as a green hotel room also have purchasing decisions, which affect environmental change (Jackson, 2010:214; Miller *et al.*, 2012:396).

Research carried out by Hillary (1995), and Smith Kemp (1998) noted that many hospitality operators (hotels included) have a limited knowledge of their environmental carbon and other footprints, which in essence is hampering their ability to implement effective environmental practices. Tzschentke, Kirk and Lynch (2008:131) believe that limited awareness amongst hotel owners of their environmental footprint has been identified as a barrier to change. Graci (2009:46) noted that lack of skills, knowledge, expertise and information in a hotel organisation and the industry as a whole has greatly hindered the level of sustainability of environmental initiatives. In addition to that, Fukey and Issac (2014:317) assert that lack of knowledge in relation to environmental issues and strategies compounded with a lack of support has widely been identified as a major constraint in business organisations that do not have the necessary expertise to introduce environmental management systems or the resources to access it. Graci (2008:254) notes that lack of information and the need to share best practices have also acted as an impediment to the implementation of green initiatives in hotels.

Savage (2007:31) believes that implementing a programme is not about having an environmental policy or management policy in place, but it is about having a workforce or human resources with expertise in environmental management. The challenge is that getting these human resources has implications for additional labour costs for any business. The adoption of environmental practices comes with a financial crunch which hinders the ability of individual organisations to make strides towards being environmentally committed (Graci 2008:254). The infrastructure cost increases by about ten to fifteen percent in the case of green building (Fukey & Issac, 2014:319).

Green building according to Chan *et al.*, (2009) involves construction of resource-efficient buildings with innovative technologies to reduce energy and water consumption and improve waste management. To overcome this problem of construction costs, hoteliers resort to implementing and adopting low cost, simple projects rather than adopting complicated measures such as green building. Moreover, Graci (2008:254) observes that where there is lack of government regulations on the tourism industry, the focus on voluntary initiatives resulted in low regulatory pressures.

Ways are being sought internationally such as *inter alia*, through the Paris Accord 2017, to reverse the increasing negative effects on climate change, also referred to as global warming, which is increasingly becoming an issue of great concern to tourism planners. Mitigating greenhouse gasses derived from transportation and accommodation activities from the tourism sector as well as adapting tourism businesses and destinations to changing climate



conditions are necessary steps in green management for hotels (Grossling, Hall, Peters & Scott, 2010:122). The green hotel business is a growing niche because not only do these establishments differentiate themselves from similar non-green hotels, but they also fulfil a need in the market for less environmentally damaging hotels (Manakatola & Jauhari, 2007:365). Masoud, Fayad, El-Fadael & Kamleh (2010:200) established that many hotels in developing countries still stand at the crossroads when it comes to adopting environmental management standards because of the lack of government support and also the deficiency of effective environmental management laws. In Lebanon for instance, lack of environmental laws and security problems caused many organisations to be reluctant or unwilling or to make investments in environmental management (Massoud., Fayad., El-Fadel and Kamleh, 2010:207). For a hotel organisation to adopt green management initiatives, both the customer and the hotel establishments have to be active in reducing adverse impacts on the environment and to make a commitment to mitigate environmental damage (Mbasera, 2014:61).

However, in South Africa and Zimbabwe, in hotels that were studied, there is relatively low local customer awareness of environmental problems emanating from hotel operations. Furthermore, hotels in these two countries, as is the case with many developing countries, there is lack of resources for implementation of green management initiatives. Accordingly, some hoteliers do not tend to give high priority to adopt sustainable environmental management practices. However, Walker and Walker (2011:311) suggest introduction of environmental practices and policies that are not capital intensive to guide eco-conscious managers with sustainable ideas for green hotels listed on Figure 1.

- Green hotels with commitment to the environment
- Planning environmentally friendly meals
- Go digital and use eco-friendly procedures such as electronic registration
- Avoid bottled water and practice filling water glasses only when asked to reduce waste
- Use fair trade items which promote healthy work environment
- Conserve energy, mitigate the power consumption related to guest travel by using carbon offsets
- Use more environmentally friendly transportation, e.g. biodiesel car rentals and eco-buses
- Encourage use of reusable bags and promote reusable bags
- Use dinnerware, glassware and encourage the use of biodegradable disposables
- Compost food scraps to reduce financial and environmental costs

**Figure 1: Components of a green hotel**

Adapted from Walker and Walker (2011:311)

It is, therefore, necessary to explore the ways hotels have assumed responsibility and commitment to environmental practices and the challenges they encounter in the process. Accordingly, this study's goal was to ascertain if hotel managers appreciate the need for environmentally friendly initiatives in their establishments. The researchers sought to find answers to research questions on the duration in which hotels have implemented green management initiatives, strategies used in implementing green management initiatives and the challenges they face when implementing green initiatives or attempting to do so.

The study was necessitated by the limited research on green management in these two developing countries, in particular on the impeding factors hindering implementation of sustainable green management initiatives in hotels.



## **Method of research**

This study was carried out following a multiple case study approach. Data was collected from eight hotels in Zimbabwe and South Africa. To reach the goal of the study, a descriptive paradigm was used, employing a qualitative research design. Interview schedule was used to collect data from the respondents comprising hotel managers from three star hotels. The content of the interview schedule was based on a review of extant literature. The interview schedule constituted two parts. The first part was intended to collect demographical information of hotel managers, considering their gender, age range, duration in the current position in the hotel. The questions on the second part of the interview schedule were largely open-ended. The open-ended questions allowed the respondents to describe their feelings about issues that required clarification as the inquiry on challenges facing hotels implementing green management initiatives was being done. Open-ended questions allowed the respondents to formulate their answers. The instrument was pre-tested for usability and clarity in a pilot study carried out at a city hotel in Zimbabwe.

In this study, purposive sampling was used to determine the research participants. Purposive or judgemental sampling is a strategy in which particular settings, persons or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that cannot be obtained from other choices (Wilson, 2010:199). A sample comprising managers in star-graded hotels in South Africa and Zimbabwe was used to collect data for this study. Participants in this study comprised general managers who were chosen on the assumption that they were implementing green management initiatives in their hotels and are acquainted with the problems faced within their hotels. The trustworthiness of the data was enhanced by the fact that all managers were well-educated and worked within establishments that had been in operation for more than 10 years. These general managers would give the most appropriate information on green management within their hotels. All participants in this study shared a common feature in that they were hotel managers in 3-5-star-graded hotels in South Africa and Zimbabwe. These hotels are spread throughout the countries in both urban and rural areas. The sample that was chosen comprised four hotel managers in Zimbabwe and four hotel managers in South Africa, respectively. The main tool employed to record interviews was a digital voice recorder

## **Data analysis**

The data were transcribed, and in this study, the researchers took the following steps As suggested by Cresswell (2009):

1. Organise and prepare data for analysis.
2. Read through all data, gain a general sense of information and reflect on the meaning.
3. Conduct an analysis based on a particular theoretical approach and method. (This often involves coding or organising related segments of data into categories.)
4. Generate a description of the setting or people and identify themes from the coding. Search for a theme connection.
5. Represent data within a research report.
- 6: Interpret the larger meaning of the data.

## **Ethical considerations**

Silverman (2003: 201) reminds researchers that they should always remember that while they are doing their research they are in fact entering the private spaces of their participants. Accordingly, issues of confidentiality were taken into consideration and interviewees were assured that data would be kept confidential and that there would be no mentioning of their



names. Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the North West University (Potchefstroom Campus: NWU-00115-12-A 4).

## Discussion

The following subset constitutes participant's responses on problems facing hotels implementing green management initiatives in Zimbabwe and South Africa. In comparison, the general managers in all four hotels in Zimbabwe are males. They are all below the age of 45 years and they all hold degrees. The general managers in South African hotels include two males and two females. Their ages range from 24 to 48. In both Zimbabwe and South Africa, the hotels are 3 to 5 star graded. All the hotels in Zimbabwe have been in operation for more than 26 years whereas in South Africa the hotels have been in operation for a period between 10 and 30 years. In all hotel cases, the participants have been managers for a period of 1 to 16 years. The first objective sought to establish the duration of time hoteliers have implemented green management initiatives in their establishments. The second objective attempted to identify challenges faced by hotel managers when implementing green initiatives.

### Duration of implementing green management initiatives

Case 1 as in case 6 no answers concerning the length of time the hotels been implementing green management. This probably indicates that the time is not known; perhaps the implementation of green management initiatives is something that has not been considered as important in these hotels. In Case 2, implementing green management started in 2009, five years ago. In Case 3, implementing green initiatives began in 2013 and made it one year since the implementation of green initiatives commenced in the hotel. The case started implementing green management in 2009. Like Case 2, the year in which this study was done was then the fifth year since the implementation of green management initiatives. In Case 5, duration of implementing green management initiatives dates back to 2010. Case 7 says the hotel started implementing green management initiatives for about 6-7 years. Case 8 says the hotel started implementing green management since September 2013. The participant said

We started around last year (2013) in September with the entry level staff. So, each quarter we look at trying to achieve certain objectives. (P8)

This indicates that this management approach is still in its infancy in this hotel, which only has one year since the implementation of green management initiatives. On the average, the hotels in South Africa and Zimbabwe have implemented green management initiatives for three years. In other words, green management is a relatively new phenomenon in many hotels.

### Strategies for implementing green management initiatives

Case 1 asserts that there is need to develop policies, vision and mission in this hotel implying the need for planning. The participant in this hotel said:

It is important for both the executive and management to understand the benefits and importance of green management before it can be cascaded down to shop floor and other line personnel. So, your quality policies, your vision and mission statements should start from the top and cascade downwards (P1).

Case 2 says it has already implemented green management initiatives; the hotel is not coming up with additional strategies for implementing green management strategies. Case 3 says it needs to educate people on the benefits of green management as a strategy for implementing green management initiatives. Each of cases 4-8 says it has already implemented green



management initiatives. These hotels are not coming up with any new strategies for implementing green initiatives. Lack of knowledge, little time invested in implementing the initiatives, limited financial resources among other things that pertain to green issues, possibly explain this. The results, therefore, indicate that hotels have already implemented a measure of green management initiatives. By implication, the hotels are not necessarily coming up with any new strategies for the implementation of green initiatives but may require improving what they started.

### **Challenges faced by hotel managers when implementing green initiatives**

The participant in Case 1 asserts that the challenge the hotel is facing is that as green management is still new in the hotel; it is not easy for employees to understand and embrace green management initiatives. The participant in this hotel said:

You will find that with anything new, it takes time for people to understand and embrace it, especially if the benefits are not immediate and accruing to them as individuals. So, there may be not necessarily resistance, but people may take time to embrace the philosophy. I think that's the only challenge we will face (P1)

In Case 2, the participant argues that it faced resistance from employees at the beginning. Implied by this statement is the idea that the employees are a contributing factor in slowing down the implementation of green initiatives in the hotel. Case 3 faces similar challenges to those faced in Case 2. The main challenge is the resistance to change by personnel. The participant said:

You know if you are trying to implement some change you will get some resistance to change. P3.

The participant of Case 4 says that there is much support from local government in implementing green initiatives. This is a significant opportunity for the hotel to reverse the negative impacts of its operations within the environment through implementation of sustainable green management initiatives. The participant of Case 5 observes that the hotel's challenges oscillate around formulating ideas on how to go green and how to make it easier and healthier for life within the environment. The hotel still lacks training on possible ways of implementing green management. In Case 7, the participant argues that one of the challenges be affording green management initiatives. The participant said:

You may want to implement these initiatives, but you might not be able to really afford it (P7)

This means an initial capital outlay is required to spearhead the process. Lastly, participant of Case 8 argues the hotel be more than 30 years old. When it was constructed, the builders were not concerned with green building then. Now, the hotel has to install a better type of air conditioner, which is much greener than what is currently in the hotel. The challenges faced in implementing green management include firstly, as green management is new in the hotels; the difficulty for employees to understand and embrace the initiative. Secondly, there is resistance from employees in the hotels. To the author's knowledge, no existing literature is consistent with this finding from the hotels, which were studied. Implications are that employees are a contributing factor in slowing down implementation of green initiatives in these hotels through their resistance to embracing green initiatives. Thirdly, another challenge is a lack of knowledge and ideas on how to go green. This finding is consistent with literature as Fukey and Issac (2014:317) assert that lack of knowledge about environmental issues is a constraint to the implementation of green initiatives. Fourthly, there is a challenge that old hotels were built by builders who were not concerned with green building then. One respondent said:

This hotel is more than 30 years old, so from a building perspective when they built 30 years ago, they weren't too concerned about green building methods because it was not a subject matter at that time. But our biggest challenge at this stage is for example installing better types of air conditioning which are much greener than



what we are currently using and it is not possible because of the way in which the building is built (P8).

Implications are that there is a problem fitting in facilities such as air conditioners suitable for green buildings. Green buildings are commonly perceived to be a lot more expensive than conventional buildings (Kats, 2003:3). The high cost is mainly due to the increased architectural and engineering designing. This leaves many hotels with no option but to implement and adopt low-cost, simple projects rather than starting with complicated initiatives requiring green buildings.

**Challenges faced by hotel managers (Authors own compilation) Sources: Interviews (2014)**

<b>Hotel case</b>	<b>Duration of implementing green management initiatives</b>	<b>Strategies for implementing green management initiatives</b>	<b>Challenges faced by hotel managers when implementing green initiatives</b>
1	Duration not known	The hotel needs to develop policies, vision, and mission.	As a new development in the hotel, it is not easy for people to understand and embrace green management initiatives.
2	It started 2009 <b>(4 years)</b>	The hotel has already implemented green management initiatives. The sub-theme is (already implemented)	Initially, there is resistance to change from personnel.
3	Started implementing green initiatives in 2013 <b>(1 year)</b>	The hotel needs to educate people (guests and personnel) on benefits of green management	Initially, there is resistance to change.
4	Said they started implementing green management since 2009 <b>(5 years)</b>	The hotel has already implemented green management initiatives.	There is support from local government.
5	Duration of implementing green management initiatives dates back to 2010 <b>(4 years)</b>	The hotel has already implemented green management initiatives.	The hotel considers it a challenge to come up with ideas on how to go green, how to make it easier and healthier for life within the environment.
6	Duration not known	The hotel has already implemented green management initiatives	The participant was not sure and forthcoming on the issue.
7	The hotel started implementing green management about 6-7 years now <b>(7 years)</b>	The hotel has already implemented green management initiatives.	One challenge the hotel may face is affordability of the green management initiative that has to be implemented.
8	The hotel started implementing green management since September 2013. <b>(1 year)</b>	The hotel has already implemented green management initiatives.	The hotel is more than 30 years old and builders were not concerned with green building then incompatibility with new needs of greening Another challenge is installation of a better type of air conditioner which is much greener than what is currently in the hotel.



## Summary

Previous studies on impeding factors hindering implementation of green management initiatives include limited knowledge amongst hoteliers, of the environmental footprint of hotels. This hampers their ability to implement environmentally friendly practices. Some do not have the necessary expertise to introduce environmental management systems or the resources to access it. Such challenges are a barrier to change. The limited knowledge and expertise is usually found amongst the employees as well, mainly because employing workforce or human resources with expertise in environmental management has implications with regard to additional labour costs for any business.

Previous studies carried out on green management in hotels found that in Zimbabwe and South Africa, there is limited documentation of information on green management (Van der Merwe & Wocke, 2007:1). This adds to the validation of the study on impeding factors hindering implementation of sustainable green management initiatives in hotels. Accordingly, this study made a significant contribution to literature.

The findings of this study revealed that there is resistance by employees to embrace green initiatives, lack of knowledge in green management and hotels fail to afford to implement green initiatives. In addition, there are no green management policies in hotels. Hotels are not certified by environmentally friendly organisations. Moreover old hotel buildings are incompatible with new needs of green tourists. Therefore, there is need for education of hoteliers and their employees in hotels, direction, and enforcement of regulations by government on green management in these two developing countries.

## Recommendations

- It is recommended that the hotel owners and their managers establish green management policies within their hotels. This is because green management policies provide rules, guidelines and prescribe what should be done so as to mitigate the environmental impacts, which emanate from the operations of the hotel. Green management policies will enable hoteliers to be in a position to draw guidance on set standards for green management implementation.
- It is further recommended that hoteliers engage in the education of customers and hotel employees on environmental impacts, which emanate from the hotel activities and their consumption behaviours. Also, customers will need to be involved in the environmentally friendly consumption of goods and services during their stay in the hotel. This is important because hotel customers' activities have an impact on the environment, for example, some customers smoke and pollute the indoor air quality. Also, customers produce considerable amounts of waste during their stay. Furthermore, customers need to be educated on eco taxes so that they may appreciate that through payment of such taxes, they are making a positive contribution towards the protection of the environment.
- There is a need for hoteliers to send their employees to attend courses developed by green initiative agencies, colleges or universities on the concept of green management. This will help hotel managers to acquire knowledge and understand what green management entails. The hoteliers will be made to understand that there are problems within the environment and how hotels contribute to these problems.



## Conclusion

This research study determined the problems facing hotels implementing green management initiatives in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Hotels are an important component of hospitality whose many activities exert great impact on global resources. Implementing appropriate green management processes lead to reduced resource consumption and improved quality of the environment in which hoteliers operate. However, there are some challenges facing hotels implementing green initiatives in an attempt to minimise the environmental impact of their operations.

Regarding challenges faced by hotel managers when implementing green management initiatives, the study revealed that employees in hotels are not finding it easy to embrace green management initiatives. It was also established that there was resistance from people in the hotels as green management was being introduced for the first time. The study also established that the hotels lack ideas on coming up with sustainable green management initiatives. The study also revealed that one of the challenges is affordability of implementing the green management initiatives, for instance where construction of the hotel was done way back when builders were not concerned with green building.

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