Chapter 2

ISO14001: The Challenges in Establishing Environmental Management Systems in Tourism and Hospitality Establishments

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ABSTRACT

In the last decades, the tourism and hospitality industries have increased their awareness toward environmental sustainability and the application of Environmental Management Systems (EMS). However, research into EMS application and its challenges in the hospitality industry has been left out of sight. In fact, it appears that most hospitality and tourism organizations have neglected to adopt and implement EMS and have failed to recognize the benefits EMS can offer. Perhaps this may explain mixed findings on EMS success adoption and implementation to date. This conceptual paper investigates the challenges and opportunities within the concept of sustainability and aims to sum the existing knowledge on EMSs and the opportunities for its successful implementation in tourism and hospitality establishments. The findings will raise awareness of the importance of EMS and stimulate changes in the way management puts its effort toward enhancing the value these establishments put on adoption and implementation of EMS.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

There is an increasing concern about environmental issues affecting the hospitality industry, particularly in the organizational management and operations. Environmental awareness is turning into a “hot” issue for managers as well as becoming a priority on the agendas of many governments (Alonso & Ogle, 2010).

This awareness is present in many industries, including tourism and hospitality. In fact, it has fostered the adoption and implementation of Environmental Management Systems (EMS), and one of the most popular applied systems is ISO14001. Relevant literature shows that while most large organizations have developed their EMS, others are still standing at the crossroads of making a decision whether to develop and implement the EMS or not. This slow development may be due to factors which include lack of resources, knowledge, and/or readiness of the managers, and other factors, such as cost and return on investment. Based on the mentioned above, we posit that challenges presented earlier could actually motivate the establishments and lead to the implementation of EMS, particularly ISO14001, in their operations – obviously, based on their ability and willingness.

One of the reasons why most tourism and hospitality establishments failed to adapt and implement EMS in their management systems and operations is lack of commitment from the top management and lack of visibility of EMS. Other areas of concern are management turnover, perceptions of costs outweighing benefits of EMS, budget and human capital constraints, insufficient training and recognition of EMS. These are critical elements to improve productivity and efficiency and brand image of the institution. In their study, Chan and Hawkins (2011) outline six EMS implementation activities to take into action for these establishments to identify EMS adoption and implementation. These activities are policy planning; procedures and controls; training and educations; communication; and review and continual improvement. However, despite this level of social responsibility and potential benefits that flow from projecting a positive image to society, the implementation of environmentally friendly initiatives in the tourism and hospitality sectors has had mixed results (Alonso & Ogle, 2005). This paper discusses the existing knowledge on the challenges in establishing environmental management systems in tourism and hospitality and identifies possible gaps in the current efforts.

2. THE CONCEPT AND THEORIES

Current literature shows evidence that tourism and hospitality industries have focused their environmental attention toward understanding and motivating and adapting environmental management practices in organizations. Within the scope of EMS implementation, researchers have identified various areas where tourism and hospitality industry could focus and benchmark, and on factors that organizations should consider for successful implementation of ISO14001 (Sambasivan & Fei, 2008). Literature also exists on creative financing techniques in setting up EMS in the organizations (Chan & Ho, 2006), and on barriers, benefits and critical issues in ISO14001 implementation (Chan & Li, 2001).

Many researchers (Chan & Wong, 2006; Chan & Hawkins, 2010; Quazi, Khoo, Tan & Wong, 2001; Lawrence, Andrews, Ralph & France, 2002; Pun, Hui, Lau, Law & Lewis, 2002) agree that the concept of environmental management, which leads to sustainability of the business, is still relatively new for some tourism and hospitality organizations and has a multitude of meanings and connotations. The concept of environmental sustainability has become a very serious and profound topic within the tourism and hospitality arena in the past decade. This is primarily due to the accelerated pace in which customer needs and expectations are changing.