

Asst 1 final

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A Vision of Change: Sustainability in the Hotel Industry

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Sustainable practice is a key focus in current times not only within the hospitality industry but also worldwide. With this new found push on sustainability on a global scale it is imperative for businesses to incorporate it into both their ethos and into the way they operate.

⁷ Sustainability has many different definitions but in its simplest form can be described as the ability to maintain a certain rate or level (Moore, J.E. *et al.* 2017). This can be applied to different aspects within the sustainability umbrella and for the purpose of this essay will relate to the 3 pillars of sustainability- social, economic and environmental (Purvis, Mao, & Robinson, 2019). .

This essay will critically evaluate the impact sustainability has had on the hotel industry and how it has become a crucial part of business practice. Relating to the 3 pillars this essay will explore Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) and the circular economy as well as business concerns that have arisen as a result of sustainability. It will delve into why sustainability is so vital within the current market and the response hospitality has had to it. Upon exploring these, this essay will draw an appropriate conclusion on the relationship between sustainability and the hospitality industry.  1

In current climates there are four main drivers that have forged the need for sustainable practice. Industrialization has created a surplus of resource consumption, waste pollution and unwanted by-products. The rise of non-governmental organizations focussed on humanitarianism and social sciences now have a growing impact on society and are consistently raising awareness around the subject. Thirdly, there is the rise of technology which is developing at a rapid rate to combat the issues that have arisen from a lack of sustainable practice. Lastly, there are global concerns rising from the impact of globalization with poverty, population growth and cultural issues being more prevalent than ever (Young, 2013).  2

 3 The basis of this comes down to the three pillars of sustainability. These three pillars can be viewed as interlocking circles with sustainability being the intersection that ties them together. The Social pillar relates to the people aspect of sustainability. This can mean both within the organisation and the cultures that are affected by the company

(Basiago, 1999). The hotel sector operates in many countries on a global scale and it is important that they are not damaging the local cultures they are branching in to. This pillar revolves around cultivating and preserving communities both locally and on a global scale. It also relates to how an organisation treats its employees, examples being, providing learning and growth opportunities and offering a healthy and safe working environment. The Economic pillar relates to profit, economic sustainability means that a business must be profitable, it can also be related to how beneficial the business is to the local and global economy. This is contradictory in a sense as to fully embody sustainable practice, an organisation cannot be focussed solely on profitability, doing so would run the risk of being inauthentic. However, profitability is the driving factor within a business and is usually the main reason for a company to get on board with operating in a sustainable manner. Whilst sustainability calls for a reduction in the usage of damaging chemicals and fossil fuels, these are usually the most cost effective. Hotel chains must trust that adapting sustainability to gain popularity with consumers will outweigh the losses taken by employing more expensive methods of operating. The Environmental pillar is the most recognised pillar of sustainability and relates to an organisations impact on the environment. The hotel industry has a huge effect on the environment and is responsible for 21% of the ecological footprint that is generated by tourism (Leyva & Parra, 2021). This has created worldwide issues through pollution and lack of viable waste management. Hospitality has had an extremely negative impact on many destinations, wreaking havoc on biodiversity, consuming astronomical amounts of water and energy and being a major contribution to climate change.

Following from this rise in public awareness, sustainability is now at an all time high and consumers are more aware and eco-conscious. This growing knowledge from consumers is now a driving factor on decision making. Meaning that consumers demand sustainable practices from businesses and therefore have cultivated a change in the way in which hotels operate. With hospitality being such a resource consuming industry, industry leaders within the sector have been forced to adapt their practices to fit the needs of the consumers and the planet. Although developing sustainable practices is a steady foot forward, it is not enough to simply adapt for advertisement purposes. Consumers want to see that a business wholeheartedly embraces the

sustainable practices it discusses and want a business that has core values set in sustainability (Kim, Hur & Yeo, 2015)

As well as the pressures from consumers, hoteliers also face government pressures and pressures from their competitors. Facing pressures from the public has caused the government to employ taxations and legislations on the hotel industry to force their hand into employing more sustainable practices. Examples of this include the ban of plastic straws which has in turn forced many hotels to cut down on or eliminate single use plastics. Marriott was one of the first major hotel chains to embody this practice and due to their influence⁵ within the hotel industry cause many hotel chains to follow suit (Alexander, 2019). Carbon pricing initiatives have been imposed by governments and the EU has employed the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive which requires any new builds to be near to zero energy (Legrand, 2019). With outside pressures mounting from industry, consumers and government, hotels are being forced to adapt CSR strategies to remain in business.⁶

The three pillars force businesses to look at alternative ways of practice. At current, society operates in a linear economy, meaning “take, make and dispose” (Jørgensen & Pedersen, 2018).⁷ The linear economy strips the planet of natural resources and generates huge quantities of waste. This created the need for the circular economy, this is based on 3 principles; to eliminate pollution and waste, circulate products and materials- rather than discard them, and regenerate nature (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, nd.). The circular economy is focused on ensuring that resources are repeatedly used as opposed to the large amounts of resources that are currently becoming waste once their purpose is fulfilled (Webster, 2015). Circular-economic thinking promotes the idea that the economy can be regenerative and strengthen rather than exploit environmental and social resources (McDonough & Braungart, 2010). To apply this to the hospitality industry- within a circular economy no product goes to waste, items used within the hotel are channelled back into usable products. This addresses the environmental pillar of sustainability as it creates a lifecycle of fully renewable, recycled and environmentally friendly materials. Hotels have been driven by consumer awareness and government regulations to increase efforts towards a circular economy and this should be seen as a positive. Hotels can expect to gain a competitive advantage and cost reduction as an outcome as well as fulfilling

the needs of the three pillars by contributing to social wellbeing and environmental protection (Julião *et al.*, 2018). An example of circular economy in action is the QO Hotel in Amsterdam. The hotel was created with the need to fully embrace sustainability, which they succeed at achieving throughout their practice, with an ethos to create a positive impact on the environment and society. The building itself is made up of thermal panels which reacts to the climate outside, controlling the temperature inside, conserving energy (QOAmsterdam, nd.). They have created a self-sustaining greenhouse which provides the hotel with food such as vegetables, fruits and fish. The greenhouse also doubles as a high tech laboratory. The fish produce nutrients which then feeds back into the plants to enable them to grow which in turn purifies the water for the fish (Mesquita, 2017). This is an excellent example of circular economy as it ensures that no by-product goes waste and is instead reused to benefit other areas.

QO provides living proof of the ability to run a hotel within the circular economy, which then poses the question of why more hotels are not run in this manner. This leads to the discussion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR can be divided into categories such as instrumental and non-instrumental. Instrumental pertains to strategies implemented to gain company profits whereas non-instrumental relates to business practices carried out to enhance societal and environmental well-being. Consumers drive for authentic sustainability mean in order for success, a company must employ non-instrumental practices. Marriott is the embodiment of this and has employed Serve 360 which seeks to combat issues within each of the pillars of sustainability. They have based their policies and goals into four main subcategories; Nurture, Sustain, Empower and Welcome. Nurture lies within the social aspect of sustainability, through this, Marriott seek to empower communities by making them a better place to live, work and visit". As part of this initiative Marriott undertakes disaster relief helping to provide financial and voluntary aid to communities affected by natural disasters. "Serve Our World" is a core value at Marriott in which employees are encouraged to volunteer within local communities worldwide. Empower also deals with social sustainability, initiatives under this category pertain to inclusivity and opportunities for employees, vendors and suppliers. Initiatives are in place to provide extra support for those with disabilities refugees, veterans and women. This shows Marriott's goals under the Serve360 are truly to embrace the societal impacts of

sustainability and are committed to cultivating change to better the community. Under the Sustain umbrella, Marriott carries out duties relating to the environmental pillar of sustainability. By building their hotels in a sustainable manner they are able to reduce their carbon footprint, manage energy usage and increase the use of renewable energy (Serve360, nd.). Marriott has embedded these values and policies into the core of their business, showing that they are embodying sustainability as part of the company rather than utilising the popularity of sustainability simply to boost revenue. With Marriott being an industry leader it is important they set an example for other hoteliers to follow suit.  10

Whilst Marriott provides an authentic approach to sustainable practices, it is easy for companies to preach similar values whilst carrying out contradictory behaviour. One such example of this is RIU Hotels & Resorts. RIU claim to focus heavily on CSR and their policies outline the positive impact they have on the environment. Their CSR offers a brief overview which states that they operate within the pillars of sustainability by implementing energy saving tactics, waste management and wildlife protection (RIU, nd.). This however was disputed when the company was accused of 'Greenwashing'- this meaning, claiming to be authentic in their endeavours whilst having an adverse effect on sustainability. RIU Hotels were shown to have removed huge sections of rainforest, diverting water supplies and destroying shrubbery (Lopez, nd.). From these allegations the hotel chain came under extreme scrutiny and the morality of the hotel chain was questioned thus resulting in a negative reputation and in turn loss of revenue and trust from consumers. Whilst Marriott provide an in depth insight into their policies and how they are actively combating sustainability issues, RIU's CSR provides more of a generalised view of their actions and policies with lack of evidence to support these claims.  11

To conclude, sustainability is a prevalent trend in today's society and will only continue to grow in coming years. The strain the hotel industry puts on the environment, the economy and society is more impactful than it has ever been and with this the need for change is now more vital than ever. Consumer focus is on the ethos and morality of companies and the CSR they carry out. In order for a hotel chain to successfully thrive in current climates it is essential they adopt these practices in a genuine manner. The three pillars of sustainability can be used as a benchmark in order for companies

to develop sustainable practice and by embodying a circular economic approach to business, hoteliers can ensure they are making a positive impact on sustainability. Embodying sustainability within their practices will appeal to consumer demands and will allow an organisation operating within the hotel industry to thrive by boosting customer loyalty and trust which will in turn help boost popularity and revenue.



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FINAL GRADE

81 / 100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

1. Research-informed Literature 16 /20

The work should contain at least **15 academic references** in support of your work from a variety of valid and reliable sources. **There is clear evidence of background reading and research, drawing on a variety of valid and relevant sources. Harvard used consistently**

2. Knowledge and Understanding of Subject 16 /20

You should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the theories/models associated with sustainability, along with a detailed understanding of the main pillars. **You have successfully covered the main points of the 3 pillars and CSR**

3. Analysis 16 /20

You should critically evaluate your sources, synthesis of information from your research and academic theories/ models and draw appropriate conclusions and recommendations. **There is evidence of critical thought and analysis, with a review of the key issues and appropriate conclusions made and described clearly**

Practical application and deployment 16 /20

The essay should include critical evaluation of a hotel's CSR strategy, including examples of targets set that align with pillars of sustainability. Compare and critically analyse the strategy with another brand's CSR strategy. **Effective coverage of Marriot's Serve 360 compared with other hotels, and relevant comparisons and analysis made**

5. Skills for professional practice 17/20

The essay should be structured in accordance with an academic essay layout (follow guidelines). **The content was clearly presented in an appropriate**

style. The key points were made and developed using examples and there was a logical flow to your discussion. The language used was clear and understandable without over-complicating the topic - this is a style that can be used in other academic work. Well done!

PAGE 1

PAGE 2



Comment 1

good intro setting the scene for your work



Comment 2

good - you could perhaps have added another ref to support the comment on 4 drivers?



Comment 3

a ref to support the origin of the 3 pillars would be good

PAGE 3



Comment 4

good - what about a ref to support this comment?

PAGE 4



Comment 5

good example



Comment 6

this seems to be a little bit out of context here - you focus on CSR later



Comment 7

good

PAGE 5



Comment 8

good, relevant example



Comment 9

ref to support his?

PAGE 6



Comment 10

good, but if you were further over the word count, comments like this could be taken out?



Comment 11

good point - useful example

PAGE 7



Comment 12

good conclusion summing up the main issues

PAGE 8

PAGE 9
