ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIVENESS AS COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE: STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THAILAND

By

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Development Administration)
School of Public Administration
National Institute of Development Administration
ISBN 974-231-705-4
2006
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ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation
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Degree
Doctor of Philosophy (Development Administration)

Year
2006

Hotels are tourism-related businesses whose survival depends on the beauty of nature and the unpolluted environment. This dissertation was aimed to investigate environmental responsiveness adoption by hotels in Thailand and to identify those factors that could influence the variation in adoption level. Two theories: stakeholder and resource-based views were selected and integrated to provide a complementary explanation of corporate environmental responsiveness. The conceptual framework was theoretically developed comprising of environmental motives, facilitating resources, and organizational characteristics as the main factors influencing the level of environmental responsiveness adopted in hotels. Eight hypotheses were derived from the model to be tested.

Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were conducted in this study. During the first phase, the exploratory field study based on in-depth interviews and hotel visits with ten environmentally best practice hotels was conducted. Findings confirmed those factors proposed in the framework.

During the second phase, 390 questionnaires were mailed to all member hotels of the Thai Hotels Association. The total number of usable returned questionnaires was 231 for a response rate of 59.23 percent. Respondent hotels were classified by cluster analysis into three groups based on the level of their environmental responsiveness. It was found that hotels in the low environmental responsiveness group were medium-sized hotels with 60-199 rooms. They were non-chain hotels with few stars ratings who set short-term environmental targets and implement energy
saving campaigns. However, neither a written environmental policy nor an environmental working team was found in these hotels. They also perceived their competitive advantages as being low. Hotels in the moderate environmental responsiveness group were mixed of medium and large sizes with approximately 60-399 rooms. The types of hotel in this group included both chain and non-chain hotels with mostly three-star ratings. They had a systematic record keeping on environmental related data and also adopted some voluntarily environmental initiatives. Hotels in the high environmental responsiveness group were mixed of medium and large ones with the number of rooms between 60-399. The types of high responsive hotels was also mixed of both chain and non-chain hotels with mostly four-to five-star ratings. Environmental concerns were stated clearly in the mission statement of these hotels. They had a strong top management involvement in environmental programs. These hotels perceived that they had the highest competitive advantages as a result of their environmental programs.

Findings of hypothesis testing indicate that the level of environmental responsiveness was predicted by perceived importance of stakeholders, expected gains of environmental initiatives, availability of tangible resources, type of hotel based on star rating, Green Leaf rating of hotels, and past experiences in receiving awards of hotels. Factors that were most powerful in predicting the level of environmental responsiveness of hotels were the perception on importance of stakeholders and the availability of tangible resources.

Implications for sustaining tourism development were based on an assumption that when many hotels in Thailand have started to pay more attention to environmental problems and have given proactive responses to those problems, the tourism industry as a whole may be approaching a level of sustainability. Local government agencies should also be consistent in their law enforcement and focus on using "marketing measures" (i.e. rewards and recognition, tax incentives) more than "regulatory measures" to stimulate more proactive environmental responsiveness from hotels in their community. Government agencies and public companies should use the green hotel directory for their consideration on places to accommodate their conferences, seminars or trainings, as it serves as good recognition for environmentally friendly hotels.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this doctoral degree has been an arduous task and has become one of the most memorable experiences of my life. I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to all those who have helped me through this gratifying path. First of all, I thank my dissertation committee chairman, Dr. Parote Pathranarakul whose patience and advices have greatly influenced my work on this dissertation. Dr. Parote has made me realize the importance of development in a “sustainable way”. I also thank the committee members, Associate Professor Dr. Fredric William Swierczek and Dr. Sethapan Krajangwongs for their guidance and trust. I received useful comments from different perspectives of their expertise to guide my work.

I also thank Assumption University (AU), my undergraduate alma master and current employer, for scholarships to attend AU and graduate studies in the USA. Special thanks go to Rev. Bro. Dr. Prathip M. Kornolmas, President Emeritus of AU for his kindness and support. I also thank the President of AU, Rev. Bro. Dr. Bancha Saenghiran, and the Vice President, Rev. Bro. Dr. Visith Srivichairatnana, and many others of AU. To name but a few, Mr. Glen Chatelier (my inspiration), Dr. Uree Cheasakun (my supportive supervisor) and Dr. Olimpia C. Racela (my best friend and editor). I am also grateful to all my former teachers at AU, NIDA and at my childhood schools: St. Francis Xavier Convent School and Triam Udom Suksa School and AFS program. They have had a significant influence on shaping the teacher that I am today.

I am very appreciative of Nong Joom at the Green Leaf Foundation, and those hotel managers, directors, and officials who gave me so much of their valuable time responding to my interview and questionnaire.

Finally I am indebted to my parents, Mr. Supharb Phonkaew and Mrs. Ranong Phonkaew much more than this one page can describe. I also am grateful to my aunt, Mrs. Nuanlaor Subcharoen for her love and endless support. Many thanks also go to my close friends and to Pee Taew, who have never let me walk alone.

Sasithorn Phonkaew
May, 2006