



## **The Power of Change Champions: Influencing Environmental Sustainability Strategies in Sri Lankan Hotels**

**Chandana Kannangara**

University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

[chandanakannangara@cinnamonhotels.com](mailto:chandanakannangara@cinnamonhotels.com)

**M. M. M. Shamil**

University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

**H. A. K. N. S. Surangi**

University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the role of change champions in the implementation of environmental sustainability strategies within the Sri Lankan hotel industry.

This study embraced a social constructionist perspective, utilizing comprehensive interviews and observational techniques to investigate the role of change champions in the Sri Lankan hotel sector. Grounded in theories from the fields of organizational change, stakeholder theory, and the resource-based view, we employed a qualitative multiple-case study methodology. This allowed us to collect data from multiple organizational levels within hotels and subsequently analyze it using thematic analysis. This research identifies four critical constraints such as financial constraints, developing people, managerial constraints, and administrative procedures that change champions are particularly required to work on.

This study underscores the significance of the role of change champions as catalysts in recognizing organizational constraints and transforming them into opportunities for the successful implementation of environmental sustainability strategies. Moreover, it highlights the need to cultivate a culture of change champions within hotel organizations to strengthen the execution of environmental strategies. Further, this study revealed the importance of the implementation of the Green Governance Framework (GGF) which includes elements such





as environment sustainability strategies and practices, sustainability performance, sustainability reporting, and sustainability assurance to drive consistence environmental sustainability performance. Furthermore, it fosters a robust sustainability management framework, aligning business strategies with economic, social, and environmental sustainability goals.

This study offers a comprehensive model that synthesizes the complexities faced by the Sri Lankan hotel industry in its pursuit of environmental sustainability. By acknowledging constraints and strategically deploying change champions, organizations can embrace sustainable practices while bolstering their competitiveness and contributing to the nation's economic and environmental well-being. The study provides valuable insights for hoteliers, policymakers, and researchers seeking to drive environmental sustainability in the context of developing economies.

**Keywords:** *Change Champions, Change Management, Environmental Sustainability Strategies, Organizational Transformation, Sri Lankan Hotel Industry*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Sri Lankan hotel industry occupies a pivotal position in the nation's economy, significantly contributing to economic growth while simultaneously raising concerns about the sustainable utilization of resources and the management of waste (Grosbois, 2012). Studies have underscored the potential for substantial enhancements in environmental performance within this industry, indicating the feasibility of adopting sustainable practices (Miththapala, Jayawardena & Mudadeniya, 2013). However, despite this potential, many hotels grapple with the intricate task of integrating sustainability as a fundamental aspect of their core operations (Lozano, 2013; Sajjad et al., 2018).

In reality, there exist glaring disparities between the well-documented sustainability policies within these establishments and their actual implementation. This disconnection is compounded by the absence of comprehensive legal mandates in the



country, leading to a stark contrast between the espoused sustainability ideals and their practical execution (Dissanayake et al., 2016; Post & Altma, 1994). Furthermore, a deficiency in knowledge and awareness concerning environmental sustainability practices exacerbates the issue, perpetuating an ad-hoc approach within the industry (Lozano, 2013).

The Sri Lankan hotel industry, situated within a developing country context, encounters a formidable challenge concerning the integration of sustainability into its fundamental operations. This challenge stems from several critical factors inherent to its environment. Firstly, as a developing nation, Sri Lanka faces economic pressures that often prioritize short-term financial gains over long-term sustainable practices. These economic demands can inadvertently deter hotels from committing fully to sustainability initiatives (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2015).

Moreover, the absence of stringent legal mandates compounds the issue. Sri Lanka's regulatory framework for environmental sustainability, though existing, lacks the robust enforcement mechanisms commonly seen in developed countries (Goger, 2013). This dearth of legal pressure reduces the impetus for hotels to proactively implement sustainability practices and fosters a compliance-based approach.

Furthermore, the country's limited resources and access to sustainable technologies pose practical constraints. The financial burden of investing in sustainable infrastructure can be overwhelming for many hotels, particularly smaller establishments (Buckley, Zhong & Martin, 2021). The limited knowledge and awareness of sustainability practices also play a significant role in the industry's struggle to translate policies into effective, actionable practices (Lozano, 2013).

In the context of Sri Lanka's environmental sustainability challenges within the hotel industry, the role of change champions emerges as pivotal. Change champions play a crucial role in driving organizational transformation towards sustainability (Carrington, Zwick, & Neville, 2019). They act as catalysts for change, facilitating the translation of sustainability commitments into actionable strategies (Wiesner,



Chadee, & Best, 2018). This study aims to scrutinize how these change agents navigate and influence the implementation of environmental sustainability strategies in Sri Lankan hotels, aiming to close the gap between stated commitments and actual practices with the research question of “What is the role of change champions when implementing environmental sustainability strategies for Sri Lankan hotel industry?”

This research paper is organized as follows: The following section provides an in-depth literature review, establishing the theoretical and empirical foundation for this study. Subsequently, the methodology section delineates the research approach and data collection methods employed. The findings of this study are then presented and analyzed in the subsequent section. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings and their potential for guiding the Sri Lankan hotel industry towards a more sustainable future.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Environment Sustainability in the Hotel Industry**

Environmental sustainability is of paramount importance to the hotel industry for several compelling reasons. Firstly, sustainability initiatives offer significant cost-saving opportunities. By optimizing resource use, hotels can reduce their operational expenses. This is particularly relevant in a developing country context like Sri Lanka, where cost efficiencies can significantly impact the financial health of hotel businesses (Wickramasinghe, 2016). In addition, environmental sustainability is an avenue for showcasing a hotel as an ethical brand with a strong commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR). In the age of conscious consumerism, travelers increasingly seek eco-friendly and socially responsible accommodations. By adopting sustainable practices, hotels can attract a niche market of eco-conscious tourists, enhancing their brand image and marketability. Furthermore, environmental sustainability aligns with the demands of travel agents and customers. Many travel agencies and tourists now prioritize hotels with environment sustainable credentials.



Meeting these demands can enhance a hotel's competitiveness and customer loyalty (Wickramasinghe, 2016).

Moreover, legal and statutory requirements underscore the importance of sustainability in the hotel industry. Governments worldwide are implementing regulations to promote environmental responsibility. Compliance with these regulations is crucial to avoid legal repercussions and maintain a positive reputation. Lastly, environmental sustainability is integral to achieving the objectives of an environment quality management system. It contributes to the overall quality of services offered by hotels, enhancing guest satisfaction and loyalty. Sustainable practices, such as efficient waste management and energy conservation, can directly impact the quality of the guest experience (Lai, 2002).

In conclusion, environmental sustainability in the hotel industry is not merely an option but a strategic imperative. It ensures the preservation of the nation's natural and cultural assets, drives economic resilience through cost savings, enhances brand appeal, meets legal obligations, and contributes to overall service quality, all of which are essential for long-term success and growth (Lai, 2002).

## **2.2. Navigating Challenges in Sri Lankan Hotel Industry's Sustainability Implementation**

Implementing environmental sustainability strategies in the Sri Lankan hotel industry presents a range of challenges that stem from the unique context of the country and its tourism sector. These challenges can impede the effective adoption of sustainable practices and hinder progress towards a greener and more responsible industry.

Firstly, inadequate regulatory frameworks and policies pose challenges. Sri Lanka's regulatory environment may lack comprehensive guidelines for environmental sustainability in the hotel sector, leading to uncertainties and inconsistencies in implementation (Wickramasinghe, 2016). Secondly, limited awareness and education about sustainability hinder progress. Both hotel staff and guests may lack awareness



of sustainable practices, preventing the effective execution of initiatives such as waste reduction and energy conservation (Lai, 2002). Thirdly, financial constraints are a significant barrier. Smaller hotels, in particular, may lack the resources to invest in sustainable technologies and infrastructure, despite recognizing their long-term benefits (Wickramasinghe, 2016).

Additionally, resistance to change within organizational cultures is a prevalent issue. Many hotels adhere to traditional practices and may resist altering established routines, thereby obstructing the integration of sustainability strategies (Lai, 2002). Finally, the lack of collaboration and partnerships can hinder progress. Insufficient cooperation between hotels, local communities, and government bodies limits the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives (Wickramasinghe, 2016). Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, involving collaboration between stakeholders, government support, increased awareness campaigns, and targeted financial incentives to encourage sustainable investments.

### **2.3. Role of Change Champion in the Implementation of Environmental Sustainability Strategies in the Hotel Industry**

The Sri Lankan hotel industry, like many others globally, is at a crossroads. The imperative of addressing environmental sustainability has never been more critical. With mounting concerns over climate change, resource depletion, and shifting consumer preferences towards eco-conscious choices, hotels in Sri Lanka are compelled to adopt environmental sustainability strategies. However, the successful implementation of these strategies presents a formidable challenge.

Environmental sustainability strategies encompass a wide range of initiatives, from reducing energy consumption and minimizing waste to promoting responsible sourcing and engaging with local communities. Each of these initiatives is laden with complexities, and their integration into the day-to-day operations of hotels can be a daunting task. It is here that the role of change champions assumes paramount importance. The concept of change champions, individuals within organizations who



champion change initiatives, is not new (Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2014). However, their significance in the context of environmental sustainability in the Sri Lankan hotel industry is deserving of closer scrutiny.

While existing literature has acknowledged the role of change champions in various organizational change initiatives, there is a notable gap when it comes to understanding their comprehensive impact in addressing multiple challenges simultaneously within the Sri Lankan hotel industry context.

To date, research has primarily focused on specific aspects of sustainability challenges and the role of change champions in mitigating those challenges. For instance, studies have explored their role in educating and sensitizing stakeholders about sustainability practices (Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2014). Others have emphasized their ability to advocate for the long-term cost savings associated with sustainability investments (Johnson & Suskewicz, 2009). Some have delved into their effectiveness in overcoming resistance to change within organizational cultures (Lai, 2002). There has also been research highlighting their potential to influence government policies and regulations related to sustainability (Wickramasinghe, 2016). Furthermore, studies have shown that they can foster collaboration among stakeholders, encouraging the sharing of best practices and resources (Bertels, Papania & Papania, 2010).

However, existing studies have overlooked the comprehensive impact of change champions in orchestrating a holistic shift toward environmental sustainability in Sri Lankan hotels (Wiesner, Chadee & Best, 2018; Taylor, Cocklin & Brown, 2012). This gap hampers our understanding of how these agents navigate multifaceted challenges, from financial constraints to regulatory uncertainties, hindering sustainability efforts. Addressing this lacuna, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive view of change champions' significance in driving sustainability initiatives within Sri Lanka's hotel industry. By synthesizing current research, it aims to highlight their pivotal role and underscore the imperative for further study in achieving environmental sustainability goals.

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## **2.4. Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical foundation of this study is deeply rooted in three pivotal theories, each synergistically contributing to a profound understanding of the role of change champions in driving the implementation of environmental sustainability strategies within the Sri Lankan hotel industry.

### **2.4.1.Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory**

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, as proposed by Wernerfelt in 1984, posits that organizations with distinctive capabilities and unique resources are inclined to adopt sustainability initiatives to attain a competitive advantage (Wernerfelt, 1984). Within the context of change champions in the Sri Lankan hotel industry, this theory accentuates the vital role these champions play in harnessing internal strengths and resources, channeling them toward the effective implementation of sustainability strategies (Barney, 1991).

For instance, change champions can be seen as the key actors in identifying and leveraging the hotel's internal resources for sustainability initiatives. Their ability to recognize and utilize distinctive capabilities, such as employee expertise in sustainability practices or efficient energy management systems, is crucial in driving the implementation of sustainability strategies. This theory underscores how change champions act as strategic agents who align the hotel's unique resources with the goals of environmental sustainability.

### **2.4.2.Stakeholder Theory**

The Stakeholder Theory, introduced by Freeman in 1984, acknowledges the pivotal influence of stakeholder pressures on shaping organizational behaviors, including sustainability engagement (Freeman, 1984). In the context of change champions, Stakeholder Theory underscores the significance of change champions as conduits





between the organization and its diverse stakeholders, interpreting and integrating stakeholder expectations into the fabric of sustainability strategies (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

Change champions serve as the bridge between various stakeholders and the hotel's sustainability initiatives. They are responsible for understanding and balancing the interests and demands of stakeholders, including guests, employees, local communities, and regulatory bodies. This theory emphasizes the role of change champions in aligning the hotel's sustainability strategies with the expectations and concerns of its stakeholders, ultimately contributing to the successful implementation of those strategies.

#### **2.4.3.Lewin's Three-Step Model**

Lewin's Three-Step Model, established by Kurt Lewin in 1947, delves into the heart of change management and the profound impact of change champions within it (Lewin, 1947). In this context, Lewin's model explicates the process of change as a three-step journey: unfreezing the status quo, implementing the desired change, and refreezing the new state (Burnes, 2004). For change champions, this theory delineates their strategic role in each phase - catalyzing the readiness for change, orchestrating its smooth execution, and ensuring its integration into the organizational ethos (Carnall, 2007).

Change champions act as the catalysts for the initial phase of change by unfreezing the existing practices and promoting the urgency of sustainability adoption. They then play a pivotal role in implementing the desired changes, effectively translating sustainability strategies into actionable steps. Finally, they are instrumental in refreezing the new sustainability-focused state within the hotel's culture and operations. Lewin's model helps elucidate how change champions navigate the complex process of change management and ensure the sustainability strategies become embedded in the organization's DNA.



This interplay of theories converges into a cohesive narrative that defines the intricate role of change champions in the implementation of environmental sustainability strategies within Sri Lankan hotels. By synthesizing the insights from RBV, Stakeholder Theory, and Lewin's Three-Step Model, this study unravels the nuanced strategies and attributes of change champions, shedding light on their pivotal function in driving sustainability transformations. In essence, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for comprehending the multifaceted role of change champions in fostering a sustainable paradigm within the Sri Lankan hotel industry.

The identified theoretical gap in the present study lies in the lack of a comprehensive exploration of the simultaneous application and integration of Resource-Based View (RBV), Stakeholder Theory, and Lewin's Three-Step Model to elucidate the multifaceted role of change champions within the Sri Lankan hotel industry (Dreyer et al., 2021; Thakhathi, 2018; Wernerfelt, 1984; Freeman, 1984; Lewin, 1947). While existing literature acknowledges the significance of these theories individually in understanding change, there exists a dearth of studies that holistically integrate these theories to illuminate the comprehensive role of change champions in driving environmental sustainability strategies within the Sri Lankan hotel industry. This gap underscores the need for a unified approach that synthesizes these theories, providing a more robust framework to comprehend the complex orchestration of change champions' roles in implementing environmental sustainability strategies within the Sri Lankan hotel industry.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This segment unveils the research methodology, centering on the role of change champions in driving the implementation of environmental sustainability (ES) strategies within the Sri Lankan hotel industry. Anchored in a social constructionist framework, the study probes the intricate landscape of change dynamics orchestrated by these champions. Employing a qualitative research paradigm, adopted with a case study method for investigation delves into the multifaceted nuances of employee



attitudes, behaviors, leadership styles, and cultural norms, all converging on the orchestration of environment sustainability goals within hotels, facilitated by change champions (Martin, 2001).

To validate research integrity and refine data collection instruments, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot study was conducted for one of the largest five-star property by interviewing one top manager, one middle manager, and one operational-level staff. Its outcomes informed the fine-tuning of interview questions, ensuring alignment with the core research objectives, which emphasize the dynamics of change champions' influence in environment sustainability strategy realization.

The study sample encompasses three number of star hotels sanctioned by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), affiliating with a prominent national hotel conglomerate. Employing purposive sampling, hotels were selected to mirror varying business models, target markets, and geographic settings across Western, Southern, and Uva provinces. Senior and middle management, alongside associate-level personnel, collectively forming the change champion continuum, were included in the study, fostering a panoramic view of change dynamics (Brotherton, 2010; Palinkas et al., 2015).

The unit of analysis for this research paper is one hotel, selected through purposive sampling, aiming to explore change champions' roles in driving environmental sustainability strategies within the Sri Lankan hotel industry (Brotherton, 2019). The core of data gathering encompassed intensive interviews with 11 respondents from the three different chosen hotels. Employing structured queries and formal interview protocols, the research probed participants' insights, attitudes, and perceptions concerning the instrumental role of change champions in steering environment sustainability strategies' implementation (Chan & Hawkins, 2010). These data instruments were iteratively refined based on insights gleaned from the pilot study, ensuring precision and depth. Secondary data collection for the study included annual reports, policy documents, internal communications, industry reports, academic literature, websites, government publications, and online reviews. These sources

provided context and insights into environmental sustainability efforts in the Sri Lankan hotel industry, aiding the understanding of change champions' roles.

The analysis methodology primarily adopts thematic analysis, sculpted to unveil the patterns and themes interwoven across diverse hotel cases. This methodological choice invites comparisons and contrasts among hotels, illuminating the change champion's decisive role in realizing ES strategies' successful implementation within the dynamic tapestry of the hotel industry. In sum, this methodological framework echoes the research's focal intention: to illuminate the nuanced orchestration of change by champions in the journey toward environmentally sustainable practices within Sri Lanka's hospitality domain.

Trustworthiness was ensured through data triangulation, involving interviews with various hotel staff levels (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Ethical considerations were met by obtaining informed consent from participants and maintaining their anonymity (Bryman, 2016). Additionally, the study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring privacy and confidentiality during data collection and analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). These measures upheld the research's credibility and ethical standards.

#### **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

##### ***What is the Role of Change Champions When Implementing Environmental Sustainability Strategies?***

Change champions play a pivotal role in overcoming constraints and facilitating the successful implementation of environmental sustainability strategies within organizations (Warrick, 2009). They must proactively identify potential organizational challenges and develop effective strategies to ensure a smooth transition during change processes (Mair & Laing, 2012). Change champions reinforce change efforts through role modeling and continuous education (Ploeg et al., 2010). These challenges often intersect with existing organizational structures,



business models, and management styles, affecting environmental sustainability outcomes (Fatoki, 2019). Given the numerous challenges faced by hotels in implementing sustainability strategies (Shanley, 2007), the role of the change champion becomes paramount in achieving environmental sustainability goals in the Sri Lankan hotel industry.

#### **4.1. Strategic Investment for Environmental Sustainability Strategies**

The segment of strategic investment for environment sustainability strategies" explores financial and commercial obstacles tied to the implementation of environmentally sustainable strategies. Interviews with Mahindra and Keeth underscore the challenge of securing funding for such strategies in the hotel industry. Independent hotels can mitigate financial barriers by recognizing sustainability's holistic benefits beyond mere profitability (Yeh, 2017). Lack of policy integration and limited understanding of sustainability's advantages also hinder investments. Keeth further reveals that inflation, exchange rates, and import taxes inhibit money circulation, freezing investment opportunities in sustainability (Keeth interview). Both Mahen and Keeth advocate changing the investment approach, adopting strategic methodologies as change champions. Keeth emphasizes the challenges tied to capital projects for environment sustainability and highlights the necessity of integrating strategic investment approaches with action priority matrices (Keeth interview).

##### **4.1.1.Strategic Investment**

Shifting the focus from initiatives to strategies and from spending to investment can transform perceptions about long-term environmental sustainability (Van den Bergh, 2011). Organizational leaders often believe that adopting sustainable practices increases operational costs, but it can also enhance both short and long-term financial performance, boosting the hotel's competitiveness (Yeh., 2017). Stakeholders, particularly customers, play a vital role in driving sustainability in hotel operations. Customer preference for green-certified hotels demonstrates this influence (Fukey &



Issac, 2014; Han and Kim, 2010; Han et al., 2011). Moreover, stakeholders must share responsibility for environmental preservation with hotel operators, leading to a collective impact (Verma, Chandra & Kumar, 2019; Han & Yoon, 2015; Rahman and Reynolds, 2016). In the quest for environmentally friendly products and services, society and the community align their preferences with customers' inclinations (Gunningham et al., 2004). Hence, adopting a broader investment perspective for environmental sustainability initiatives considering the preferences and behaviors of diverse customer segments is imperative.

Strategic investments need to create value for the organization, stakeholders, and the environment. Immediate implementation of sustainability initiatives not requiring significant investment is crucial. Investments should be strategically aligned using an action priority matrix, focusing on "quick wins" and "fill ins." Employees should be encouraged to implement low-cost or cost-free sustainability initiatives promptly.

*Keeth stated, "We have not stopped projects at once and looked at the possibilities of how we should continue the project on a segment-by-segment basis as a change management approach."*

Large-scale projects can adopt a phased approach, starting with smaller investments rather than waiting for substantial funding (Keeth interview). This segmented project approach allows projects to progress partially, accumulating financial and environmental benefits over time.

#### **4.1.2. Prioritize and Split Investments**

Large businesses often incorporate concepts like a sustainability department and a dedicated budget for sustainability, which are less common in the hotel industry (Hudson, Lean, & Smart, 2001; Hyvonen & Touminen, 2006). Economic challenges have shifted the focus of the Sri Lankan hotel industry towards business survival, causing sustainability goals to take a backseat. Hotels prioritize compliance with minimal environmental requirements, and the change management approach toward sustainability becomes gradual (Kularatne et al., 2019; Rodriguez-Melo & Mansouri,



2011). Current import tax laws, high exchange rates, and inflation have constrained investment avenues, affecting environmental sustainability initiatives. Some firms implement marginal sustainability initiatives if they promise a quick payback, regardless of their actual impact (Keeth interview).

*Keeth stated, “We have not stopped projects at once and looked at the possibilities of how we should continue the project on a segment-by-segment basis as a change management approach.”*

Keeth, a resort manager, highlighted the challenges tied to investment for various capital projects in sustainability agendas. He emphasized a segmented approach to project continuation as a change management strategy. In such an approach, projects are executed in phases, with investments split into parts to ensure steady progress (Keeth interview).

*Harsha stated “It is challenging and important to prioritize and split the investments to implementation of environment sustainability strategies/projects as a role of change champions”*

Due to high interest rates, the hotel industry struggles with financing operational expenses through overdraft facilities. Survival takes precedence over investment. Harsha emphasized the importance of prioritizing and splitting investments for the implementation of sustainability strategies as a role of change champions (Harsha interview).

By prioritizing and distributing investments across various sustainability projects, hotels can optimize limited resources and effectively address financial constraints. This approach entails a meticulous evaluation of financial resources, return on investment, and collaboration among stakeholders.

Prioritization and splitting investments align with the overarching sustainability vision, ensuring optimal allocation of resources (Harsha interview).

## 4.2. People Development

Employee development plays a pivotal role in implementing sustainability strategies in hotel organizations, necessitating environmental awareness, knowledge, concern, and suitable behavior (Chan et al., 2014). Furthermore, research highlights that awareness and environmental knowledge directly impact managers' sustainability performance, with an indirect effect on sustainability behaviors (Safari et al., 2018). However, high employee turnover, particularly among skilled workers, poses challenges for the industry, leading to skills shortages and business setbacks (Utoro & Gustomo, 2014; Surji, 2013).

### 4.2.1. Staff Retention and Environment Sustainability in Hotel Organizations

The changing landscape of the hotel industry necessitates new recruitment and retention strategies to successfully implement short- and long-term environmental sustainability (ES) strategies. Economic crises and tax schemes have driven employees to seek overseas job opportunities, prompting the need for revised compensation packages (Chan et al., 2014; Utoro & Gustomo, 2014). Organizations should consider crisis allowances to maintain employee satisfaction. Recognizing unique skills and providing non-financial incentives, like family recognition programs, can boost employee loyalty and retention (Safari et al., 2018; Aminudin, 2013). High employee turnover, exacerbated by socioeconomic challenges, requires internal strategies, such as enhancing emotional commitment, reducing uncertainty, and promoting intrinsic motivation.

Similarly, Geetha highlighted the importance of staff retention as a role of change champions in the successful implementation of environment sustainability strategies.

*Geetha stated that “It is challenging and important to have staff retention strategies as a role of change champions in for successful implementation of environment sustainability strategies.”*





Retaining skilled staff is essential for ES implementation as highlighted by Geetha, aiding the overcoming of challenges posed by high turnover in the Sri Lankan hospitality sector (Dissanayake et al., 2016; Lee, 2019).

#### **4.2.2. Developing Staff's Education and Awareness about Environment Sustainability**

Educating and training staff are pivotal for successful environmental sustainability performance. Employee participation during planning may not affect commitment if organizational responsibilities are clear. Training enhances human capital and organizational capacity (Chan & Hawkins, 2010; Renwick et al., 2008). Relevant training aligns skills with sustainability goals, thereby impacting an organization's operations. Supervisory support and training can foster eco-friendly behaviors. Embedding environment sustainability education in local school curricula can instill environmental responsibility at a young age.

Apart from that Harsha's statement regarding the role of change champions in developing staff education, training, and awareness for the successful implementation of environment sustainability strategies sheds light on an important aspect of overcoming constraints faced by Sri Lankan hotels in this regard.

*Harsha stated that “One of the key aspects of the role of the change champion is to develop staff education training and awareness to successfully implement environment sustainability strategies”*

Harsha's perspective underscores the role of change champions in staff education and awareness. Change champions facilitate workshops, training, and awareness campaigns to improve employees' understanding of sustainability's benefits and practical implementation (Geetha's interview in accordance with her insights as mentioned above; Shwetha, 2019).

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#### **4.2.3. Developing Employee Motivation and Commitment**

Recruiting and retaining competent employees is challenging due to demographic shifts. Many workers lack intrinsic motivation, affecting job-related engagement, especially in labor-intensive industries like hospitality. Organizations should align individual motivations with the company's vision, strategies, and goals. A strong rewards system, recognizing environmental contributions, can drive employees to explore innovative solutions. Employees who feel valued and engaged tend to demonstrate better performance, job satisfaction, and commitment.

In addition to that Nalin's below statement emphasizes the crucial role of change champions in developing employee motivation and commitment to successfully implement environment sustainability strategies for the hotel.

*Nalin stated, “Developing employee’s motivation and commitment is a spectacular role of change champion to successfully implement environment sustainability strategies.”*

Nalin's statement underscores the role of change champions in fostering a positive work environment, motivating and engaging employees to contribute effectively to sustainability strategies (Geetha's interview in accordance with her insights as mentioned above; Aminudin, 2013; Shwetha, 2019).

#### **4.2.4. Fostering Environmental Stewards: Empowering Generation Z through Engagement in Sustainability Strategy Implementation**

The inclusion of Generation Z empowerment in sustainable strategy implementation aligns with the predominant use of 10%-15% trainees in hotels, often belonging to this generational cohort, aiming to alleviate the burden on the permanent workforce and accommodate seasonal demands (Sajjad, Jillani, & Raziq, 2018). Given their pivotal role in the industry's future, educating and raising awareness among Gen Z trainees about environmental sustainability is crucial, forming the bedrock of their hospitality career and fostering a sustainable mindset (Markos & Sridevi, 2010).



Generation Z employees in the hotel industry require motivation and engagement activities due to repetitive and labor-intensive tasks. Engaging Generation Z in environmental sustainability strategies is crucial, as they possess strong environmental concerns and demonstrate green behaviors. Implementing sustainability behaviors should start at schools, fostering a sense of environmental responsibility early on. Fostering Gen Z's attitudes towards sustainability through rewards and recognition programs can drive environmental engagement.

Further to the interview discussion had with Geetha she elucidated that current employee's knowledge, attitude, and behavior patterns for environment sustainability performance mainly depend on the types of work that staff engaged in and the number of repetitive tasks they are required to perform during the longer hours of service.

*Geetha stated "On the other hand, hotel staff mostly do the same job repeatedly and there could be work fatigue and monotony in the work that staff performed. Therefore, management is required to find the ways and means to create synergy between each employee's work engagement, and excitement during the period of various tasks they perform."*

Understanding Generation Z's behavior and preferences is essential for change champions to effectively guide their involvement in sustainability initiatives (Geetha's interview in accordance with her insights as mentioned above; Shwetha, 2019).

In addition to that Mahen's statement highlights the importance of understanding the behavior patterns of the current generation, specifically Generation Z, and supporting them as change champions to successfully implement environment sustainability strategies in Sri Lankan hotels.

*Mahen stated that "It is vital for them to understand the behavior pattern of the current generation (Gen Z) as the hotel management and to support them to engage with successfully implementation of environment sustainability strategies in the hotel as a role of change champion"*

Generation Z individuals have unique characteristics and preferences that influence their engagement with sustainability initiatives. Generation Z is known for its strong environmental consciousness and desire to contribute to social and environmental causes (Prayag et al., 2022). They value sustainability and expect organizations to demonstrate a commitment to environmental responsibility. Therefore, it is crucial for hotels to align their sustainability strategies with the values and interests of Generation Z.

#### **4.2.5. Establishing a Proper Reward & Recognition Scheme**

While hotels have various awards schemes, there's often a lack of specific recognition for outstanding environmental sustainability contributions. A well-designed rewards system can encourage environmental sustainability contributions and reinforce desired behaviors. Recognition positively impacts employee motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment. Implementing an ES-specific rewards and recognition system can encourage employees to actively participate in sustainability efforts, contributing to a culture of sustainability within the organization.

In addition to that Malan's below statement highlights the need for Sri Lankan hotels to develop a specific rewards and recognition system as a role of change champion to acknowledge and motivate staff for their outstanding environment sustainability initiatives.

*Malan stated that “There is a current need and hotel management should develop a specific rewards and recognition system as a role of change champion particularly to recognize outstanding environment sustainability initiatives to engage and motivate staff for environment sustainability strategies.*

Implementing such a system can be instrumental in engaging employees and driving the successful implementation of sustainability strategies in hotels. Malan emphasizes the need for a rewards and recognition system as the role of change champion to motivate staff for their environmental sustainability initiatives (Renwick et al., 2012;



Cantor et al., 2012; Cameron & Pierce, 1994; Eisenberger et al., 1999; Shwetha, 2019).

#### **4.2.6. Integrating Environment Sustainable Objectives with Performance Management System**

To ensure widespread environmental sustainability commitment, objectives must be integrated into departmental responsibilities and performance management systems. Environment sustainability should be given prominence compared to other business priorities, emphasizing its importance for the brand's repositioning. Regular audits and feedback mechanisms ensure sustained progress. Sustainability change champions can facilitate this process, aligning individual performance goals with environment sustainability objectives. Integrating these goals with performance evaluations creates a culture of sustainability, fostering ownership and accountability among employees.

Furthermore, Geetha's below statement emphasizes the importance of integrating environment sustainability objectives into the performance objectives of all department staff in order to successfully implement sustainability strategies in Sri Lankan hotels.

*Geetha stated that “We as a hotel management, environment sustainability objectives need to be given for all department staff and linked with staff annual performance objectives as a new requirement to successfully implement environment sustainability strategies in the hotel”*

By aligning individual performance goals with sustainability objectives, hotels can create a sense of ownership and accountability among employees, ultimately driving the implementation of sustainability initiatives.

Geetha's view emphasizes the integration of ES objectives into performance evaluations to drive a sustained culture of sustainability (Geetha's interview in



accordance with her insights as mentioned above; Locke & Latham, 1990; Gruman & Saks, 2011).

### **4.3. Management Development**

Effective integration of environmental sustainability within an organization requires a strong commitment from top leadership (Fatoki, 2019). The transformational leadership style has been identified as pivotal for driving change (Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009). To ensure successful organizational change, leaders need to address internal organizational changes fostering change drivers and adopt appropriate strategies to overcome barriers (Lozano, 2013).

#### **4.3.1. Enhancing Top Management Commitment & Support**

Studies highlight the impact of top management commitment on hotels' environmental sustainability performance, affecting both financial and nonfinancial outcomes (Jang, Zheng, & Bosselman, 2017). This commitment is a crucial competitive driver, influencing comprehensive environmental sustainability adoption in the hotel sector (Iraldo et al., 2017). Top management's commitment serves as a facilitator for pro-environmental and social initiatives (Dilchert & Ones, 2012). Therefore, it becomes a fundamental prerequisite for implementation.

Top management's commitment is integral in embedding sustainability into an organization's culture (Paillé et al., 2014). Organizations must balance economic and environmental considerations (Cavagnaro & Curiel, 2012). Supervisors also play a significant role as change agents, integrating sustainability into strategy, culture, and behavior (Cantor et al., 2012). Employee engagement is driven by top management support and resource allocation (Paillé et al., 2014).

In addition to that Nalin's below statement highlights the crucial role of top management commitment, support, and visible leadership in successfully implementing environment sustainability strategies as a change champion in Sri Lankan hotels.





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*Top management commitment, support, and visible leadership approach are strongly required to be embedded into organization culture for successful implementation of environment sustainability strategies.*

The involvement and endorsement of top management are vital to drive change and create a culture of sustainability within the organization. When top management demonstrates a strong commitment to sustainability, it sets the tone for the entire organization and creates a sense of urgency and importance around sustainability initiatives. This commitment can inspire and motivate employees to embrace sustainability practices and actively participate in their implementation.

#### **4.3.2. Closing the Knowledge Gap: Top Management Awareness**

The insufficiency of top management's knowledge and awareness concerning the organization's environmental sustainability strategies becomes evident through insights provided by Geetha. A focal area necessitating attention pertains to the execution of sustainability strategies within the organization. Additionally, Geetha points out that the top management's understanding is deficient regarding the evaluation of both short-term and long-term advantages inherent in various environmental sustainability strategies. She suggests a change management strategy, advocating for the immediate acquisition of requisite skills and expertise to facilitate the effective implementation of sustainability strategies. While such a tactic aligns with short-term change management objectives, it concurrently stands as a long-term investment in the organizational context.

*Geetha stated that top management has a knowledge gap related to assessing long-term and short-term benefits of respective environmental sustainability strategies for them to make appropriate decisions as and when required.*

Lakshan further underscores the significance of garnering wholehearted commitment from middle management and associates. Achieving this commitment requires the senior management to invest a substantial amount of time in comprehensively communicating sustainability agendas. Lakshan recommends the allocation of time



similar to that dedicated to business development and management. Such a strategy fosters an environment where sustainability knowledge permeates throughout the organization, elevating it to a priority akin to daily business operations.

*Lakshan stated that Change strategies need to be adopted by top management by allocating sufficient time to transfer the environment sustainability-related knowledge across the whole organization compared to the major time that they allocate for business development and management.*

In addition to that Kalpa emphasizes the importance of filling the awareness and knowledge gap among top management as a crucial first step in driving the implementation of environment sustainability strategies in hotels.

*Top management awareness and knowledge gap need to be filed as a first step to drive this implementation of environment sustainability strategies for hotels. Then these hotels can be actively seen as many opportunities as possible to create value for business after the successful implementation of those initiatives and strategies.*

When top management is equipped with a deep understanding of sustainability and its potential business benefits, they can actively seek opportunities for integrating sustainability into the hotel's operations and strategies.

The pivotal role of top management is further underscored by Kalpa, who emphasizes that addressing the awareness and knowledge gap within this echelon represents a foundational stride toward implementing sustainability strategies. Kalpa advocates for informed top management capable of discerning the potential value-creation avenues for the business. In this vein, top management, armed with a comprehensive grasp of sustainability and its associated advantages, can actively explore avenues for integrating sustainability across the hotel's operational and strategic domains.

To catalyze sustainability initiatives effectively, change champions play a crucial role in influencing top management. This entails elevating their awareness of sustainability's significance and its potential to engender positive impacts on the





business. This proactive approach encompasses showcasing potential cost savings, reputation augmentation, and market differentiation that can accrue from embracing sustainable practices (Michelon & Parbonetti, 2012). By bridging the knowledge gap and furnishing pertinent information and training, change champions facilitate the top management's recognition of sustainability's value, prompting proactive support for its incorporation (Michelon & Parbonetti, 2012).

For a sustainable transformation to transpire, it is imperative that change champions initiate this paradigm shift from the pinnacle. This endeavor fosters a collective comprehension among top management regarding the benefits and opportunities intrinsic to sustainability, paving the way for a concerted commitment and strategic assimilation of sustainability into the core operational fabric of the hotel.

#### **4.3.3. Influence through Networking: Top Management Connections**

Research has revealed the positive linkage between top management's tangible competencies and relationship-based business networks with environmental sustainability performance. Likewise, relationship-based business networks have demonstrated a positive correlation with environmental sustainability performance (Akhtar et al., 2018). This underscores the potency of individual competencies and skills in enhancing environmental sustainability, contrasting the previous viewpoint that environmental sustainability relies on the involvement of numerous individuals or teams (Hart, 1995, p. 989). However, the existing research has largely focused on business-wide networks and their impact on knowledge and business performance, sidelining the role of individual skills in developing relationship-based business networks. As a remedy, researchers have stressed the incorporation of micro-foundations into network-based theories, underscoring the pivotal role of individual competencies and skills in fostering relationship-based business networks, thereby promoting environmental sustainability (Akhtar et al., 2018).



Further to the interview discussion with Keeth explained the relationship between top management environmental sustainability-related networking influences and the environment sustainability performance of the organization.

*Top management/director's professional affiliations/ their network connections highly influence to take place positive changes for environmental sustainability performance in the business organization.*

Insights from Keeth further underscore the influence of top management's network connections on environmental sustainability performance. Keeth's observation reveals that top management's affiliations and connections significantly contribute to positive changes in environmental sustainability performance within an organization. Keeth's elucidation delves deeper into how these connections drive organizational changes. For instance, the acquisition of Green Globe environmental sustainability certificates in 2012, subsequent transitions to ISO 14001 and travel life certification, and the establishment of green board committees are all attributed to top management's affiliations and network connections. Moreover, Keeth notes that top managers' associations with organizations practicing robust environmental sustainability strategies serve as a catalyst for knowledge exchange and implementation of effective sustainability practices.

Keeth also explained how top management networks connections influence for implementation and enhancement of the environmental sustainability performance of the organization as explained below.

*“Top managers /directors who attached to the organization where they have a strong environmental sustainability practice, shared their experiences related to benefits, advantages of outcomes as well as how to implement strong environmental sustainability practices within the organization. Therefore, sharing the largest organizations /multination organization's environmental sustainability-related best practices with our top management is one of the main change drivers for our*



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*organization to change and adapt with the best environment sustainability practices.”*

In summary, the integration of individual competencies and skills with relationship-based business networks can be harnessed to augment organization-wide environmental sustainability performance. Keeth's insights emphasize the significant role of top management's affiliations and network connections in driving positive changes and promoting environmental sustainability practices. These connections serve as conduits for knowledge exchange, best practice implementation, and the establishment of effective governance frameworks, collectively leading to enhanced environmental sustainability within organizations.

#### **4.4. Empower Workforce**

The concept of empowering the workforce emerges as a central tenet in driving effective environmental sustainability strategies within hotels. The revelations from interviews with hotel team members underscore the profound impact of motivated employees on organizational productivity and profitability. Tariq, Jan, and Ahmad (2016) highlight the pivotal role of human resources in the success of business enterprises. Motivated employees not only ensure the smooth functioning of day-to-day operations but also contribute significantly to the realization of long-term sustainability goals. This implies that employees who are empowered to take ownership of sustainability initiatives are more likely to display increased dedication and innovation in their roles, fostering a culture of environmental responsibility.

Moreover, the testimonies of hotel team members point to the transformative potential of an empowered workforce in overcoming challenges related to administrative procedures and policies. Lamm, Tosti-Kharas, and King (2015) highlight that empowered employees are better equipped to address constraints stemming from organizational administrative procedures. Such employees are more likely to view these challenges as opportunities for innovation and problem-solving. Consequently, enabling employees to transcend their routine duties becomes a pivotal

strategy for navigating the complex landscape of environmental sustainability in the hotel industry.

#### **4.4.1. Decision Prioritize Matrix**

The notion of introducing a decision prioritization matrix represents a significant paradigm shift in the effective management of environmental sustainability strategies within hotels. The conventional approach of centralized decision-making by the sustainability team is recognized as a potential bottleneck in the implementation of sustainability initiatives. The delay in decision-making stemming from the need for approvals from the central team can impede the timely execution of initiatives. This is where the proposed decision prioritization matrix offers a transformative solution. This matrix acts as a decentralized framework that empowers individual hotel managers to assess the feasibility of implementing sustainability initiatives at their properties.

Furthermore, Mahen highlights the importance of implementing a decision prioritization matrix as a key task for change champions in driving the implementation of environmental sustainability strategies in Sri Lankan hotels.

*Encouraging and implementation of decision prioritize matrix is one of the key tasks require to be actioned by the role of change champion for the implementation of environment sustainability strategies.*

A decision prioritization matrix is a tool that helps in identifying and ranking the most important sustainability initiatives based on their impact, feasibility, and alignment with organizational goals. By utilizing this matrix, change champions can empower staff and provide them with a structured approach to prioritize and implement sustainability strategies more effectively and efficiently.

This approach resonates with the principles of integrated sustainability management, wherein resources are allocated strategically to initiatives with the highest potential for impact (Bansal & Roth, 2000). By empowering hotel managers to make informed



decisions, the matrix ensures that initiatives align with the unique circumstances of each property, promoting faster execution and adaptation. This bottom-up approach not only expedites decision-making but also encourages a sense of ownership among hotel managers, fostering a proactive stance toward sustainability.

#### **4.4.2. Establish a Proper Management Control System: The Green Governance Framework (GGF)**

The establishment of a comprehensive Green Governance Framework (GGF) emerges as a critical step in steering hotels toward sustainability. This framework comprises interconnected components that collectively embed sustainability into the organizational fabric. Shamil and Samarakoon (2021) elucidate the four components: sustainability strategy and practices, sustainability performance management framework, sustainability reporting method, and sustainability assurance scheme. Each element contributes to creating a coherent roadmap for the integration of sustainability into various operational facets.

As clarified by Geetha, each property quarterly updates ES data into the P3 system. Then the property head of engineering and head of HR are required to verify those data and finally property general manager is required to approve those data. Then these P3 reports will end up with Goodera system consultants and the group sustainability team.

*Getha stated that at the end of every quarter, Goodera system consultants produce a summary report for all properties through the group sustainability team for each property to review relevant sustainability initiatives and action the areas for improvements with immediate effect. As elucidated by Geetha this is just another exercise for the hotel and there is no strong management commitment to review these quarterly reports and action plans as most of the management and staff are tied up with day-to-day business operation requirements.*

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Malan further emphasizes the need for a shift in management approach and the establishment of a strong governance framework to drive the implementation of environmental sustainability strategies in Sri Lankan hotels.

*The current management approach requires to be changed and there should a strong governance framework for the implementation of environment sustainability strategies for the hotel.*

He suggests conducting monthly and quarterly environment sustainability review meetings involving senior management and department champions to actively monitor and enhance sustainability performance. This proposed framework aligns with the organization's existing practice of reviewing and improving other strategic areas such as finance, customer experience, and people/training development.

The significance of the GGF lies in its ability to address challenges arising from procurement issues and consumption patterns. The dynamic nature of the hotel industry, marked by ongoing procurements and resource consumption, necessitates a structured approach to sustainability. The GGF not only aligns sustainability efforts with the organization's strategic goals but also establishes a robust reporting and assurance mechanism. This ensures that sustainability initiatives are not just superficial gestures, but concrete actions backed by transparent reporting and third-party verification. Through the GGF, hotels can navigate the intricacies of sustainability management while ensuring accountability and reliability in their sustainability endeavors.



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#### **4.4.3. Year-on-Year Sustainable Growth: Realistic Targets and Objectives**

Setting realistic year-on-year sustainability targets and objectives emerges as a critical component in the successful implementation of environmental sustainability strategies within hotels. However, the challenges posed by socioeconomic uncertainties, import restrictions, and procurement issues underscore the need for adaptable and achievable objectives. The SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) principle, encompassing Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound objectives, emerges as a guiding framework for this endeavor.

In addition to that Kalpa emphasizes the importance of developing year-on-year realistic sustainability targets/objectives for the successful implementation of environment sustainability strategies in hotel organizations.

*It is a vital aspect to strongly consider the SMART principle for developing objectives for environment sustainability strategies for hotel organizations rather than just the sake of developing objectives for environment sustainability strategies.*

Kalpa suggests applying the SMART principle when setting these objectives, which means they should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. By following this approach, the objectives become more meaningful and motivating for the staff, encouraging their active engagement and alignment with the organization's strategic sustainability goals.

The significance of this principle lies in its ability to transform objectives from mere aspirations to actionable strategies. Specific objectives provide clarity and direction, allowing stakeholders to comprehend the intended outcomes. Measurable objectives enable the tracking of progress, ensuring that initiatives are on course (Raza & Khan, 2022). Achievable objectives foster confidence and motivation among stakeholders, making them more likely to engage actively (Úbeda-García et al., 2021). Relevant objectives ensure that sustainability efforts are aligned with the broader



organizational strategy. Time-bound objectives create a sense of urgency, compelling stakeholders to act promptly.

Customizing objectives to match the organization's business strategy and addressing ongoing challenges ensures that sustainability goals remain attainable. This adaptive approach acknowledges the dynamic nature of the hotel industry and the need for agility in pursuing sustainability targets.

#### **4.4.4. Guest Engagement in Environmental Sustainability**

The active engagement of guests in environmental sustainability initiatives signifies a crucial avenue for driving change within the hotel industry. As highlighted by various scholars, the resource-intensive nature of hotels demands the collaborative efforts of both the establishment and its guests to curtail resource consumption. The traditional approach of disseminating information through notices in guest rooms is recognized as insufficient in fostering meaningful engagement. Instead, the interviews emphasize the importance of interactive dialogues and shared activities to cultivate a sense of shared responsibility.

Further to the discussion had with Malan, he clarified the current practices that the hotel used to communicate environment sustainability strategies for hotel guests as explained below.

*The hotel has implemented a few initiatives to communicate environment sustainability strategies for hotel guests mainly in the guest room such as displaying the hotel environment sustainability commitment/policy in the bathroom, introducing a tent card to reuse bathroom linens, and message to close the window in case if a guest wanted to go for room balcony. These notices are a kind of traditional approach which may not be the right approach to actively engage with guests for environmental sustainability strategies.*

As per Malan, these notices are a kind of traditional approach which may not be the right approach to actively engage guests for hotel environment sustainability





strategies such as brief awareness to be conducted particularly for tour groups about hotel environment sustainability commitments and initiatives, Hotel Garden walk through with hotel guest, provide the experience for hotel guest to participate for organic cultivation project and etc.

Furthermore, Keeth highlights the need for a cultural shift within hotels to prioritize and promote environment sustainability features. As a change champion, Keeth suggests that hotels should give due prominence to these features in their organization setup and marketing communication channels to create strong awareness among customers.

*Hotels need to change the culture and organization set up by providing due prominence for environment sustainability features as a role of change champion to make memorable stay for guests such as comparable rooms, delightful foods, beautiful features, higher level of service delivery and etc.*

By integrating environmental sustainability into various aspects of the guest experience, such as room features, food offerings, and service delivery, hotels can enhance the overall guest experience and create a memorable stay.

Integrating active aligns with the emerging concept of sustainability-oriented marketing, which entails integrating sustainability principles into marketing strategies (Han & Stoel, 2017). By prominently showcasing their environmental sustainability initiatives, hotels can not only differentiate themselves in a competitive market but also appeal to an increasingly environmentally conscious customer base. This approach transforms guest engagement from passive participation to active collaboration, enabling guests to contribute meaningfully to sustainability efforts.

Successful implementation of environmental sustainability strategies within the hotel industry requires a holistic approach that considers employee empowerment, decentralized decision-making, robust governance frameworks, adaptable objectives, and guest engagement. Through these strategies, hotels can transition toward a more sustainable operational model, aligning with both business objectives and global



environmental imperatives. As the industry navigates challenges and opportunities, these insights provide a roadmap for meaningful change within the realm of environmental sustainability.

## **5. MODEL DEVELOPMENT**

The model developed for the role of change champions in implementing environmental sustainability strategies within the Sri Lankan hotel industry embodies a comprehensive framework aimed at effectively addressing the challenges and opportunities inherent in this endeavor. This model, as depicted in Figure 1, underscores the critical interplay between acknowledging organizational constraints and deploying change management strategies, facilitated by change champions.

At its core, the model recognizes a range of organizational constraints that impede the seamless adoption of environmental sustainability strategies in hotels (Thiermann & Sheate, 2021). These constraints encompass financial, and managerial constraints, developing people, and administrative constraints. In response to these challenges, organizations need to establish a clear sense of purpose and adopt appropriate environmental sustainability practices and strategies aligned with their short-term and long-term objectives (Jones & White, 2019). An essential component of this model is the establishment of a Green Board Committee (GBC) responsible for overseeing and ensuring the successful functioning of the organization's green governance framework (GGF) (Post, Rahman & Rubow, 2011).

The GBC plays a pivotal role in reviewing and assuring the environmental, financial, social sustainability, and governance performance of the organization on a regular basis (Hayes, 2002). Crucially, change champions are integral members of the Green Board Committee, leveraging their strong relationships and influential power among the committee and all other stakeholders (Aguilera et al., 2021). Their involvement is vital for overcoming various organizational challenges and ensuring the effective execution of environmental sustainability strategies in alignment with the organization's GGF to achieve sustainability goals (Cooke et al., 2020).



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This model offers a synthesized response to the complexities faced by the Sri Lankan hotel industry in its quest for environmental sustainability. By integrating the identification of constraints with the strategic deployment of change management strategies, facilitated by change champions, this framework provides a holistic approach to embedding sustainability within the core operations of hotels, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable future for the industry.

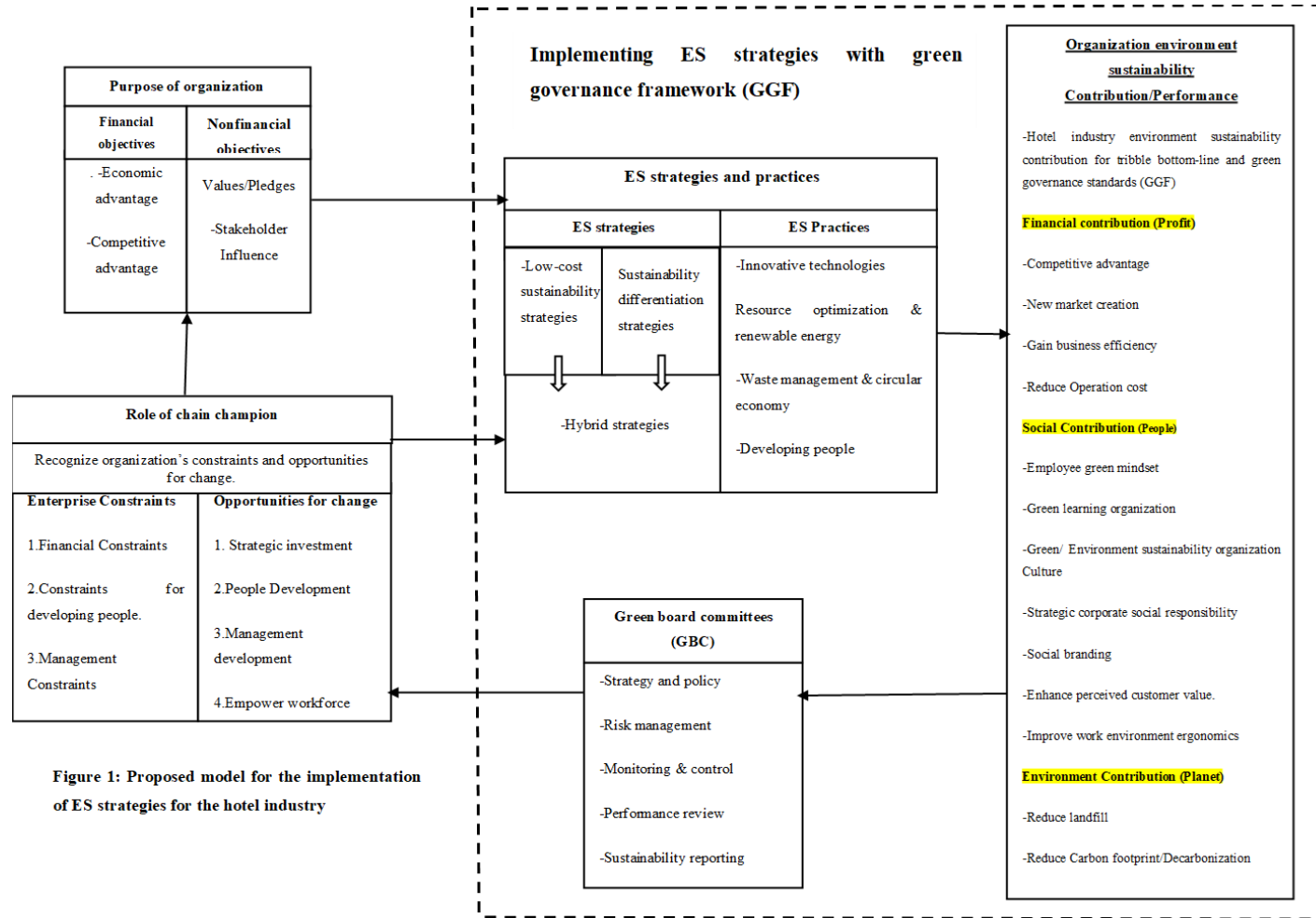


Figure 1: Proposed model for the implementation of ES strategies for the hotel industry



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## 6. CONCLUSION

This research embarked on a critical exploration of the role of change champions in the implementation of environmental sustainability strategies within the Sri Lankan hotel industry. Our journey through this study has uncovered crucial insights into the challenges, opportunities, and complexities of embedding sustainability practices within this vital sector of the nation's economy. The Sri Lankan hotel industry, while possessing the potential for enhanced environmental performance, often grapples with integrating sustainability into its core operations. This study addressed this challenge by shedding light on various aspects, including organizational constraints, opportunities for change, the role of change champions, the Green Board Committee, and the green governance framework. It has provided a comprehensive understanding of how these elements interplay and influence the implementation of environmental sustainability strategies.

Our research made significant contributions to the field. We illuminated the intricate web of organizational constraints, both internal and external, which hinder the seamless adoption of sustainability strategies. Simultaneously, we identified key opportunities for change within the industry, including alignment with global trends, local community engagement, and the potential for cost savings through resource optimization. The role of change champions emerged as a central theme, showcasing the pivotal influence of individuals who proactively drive sustainable change within organizations. Our study underscores their importance in recognizing, addressing, and mitigating organizational challenges while facilitating the execution of sustainability strategies. The introduction of the Green Board Committee and the green governance framework provides a structured approach for organizations to navigate the sustainability landscape effectively. It emphasizes the need for a dedicated committee to oversee environmental, financial, social sustainability, and governance performance while actively involving change champions in this process. Our research affirms that implementing environmental sustainability strategies is a multifaceted endeavor. It necessitates a dynamic approach, involving not only the



integration of sustainability practices but also the consideration of broader economic, social, and environmental objectives. Organizations must align their strategies with these overarching goals to achieve long-term sustainability.

This study makes a substantial theoretical contribution by integrating Lewin's Three-Step Model, Resource-Based View (RBV), and Stakeholder Theory in the context of the Sri Lankan hotel industry (Author et al., Year). These theories synergistically provide insights into the implementation of environmental sustainability strategies, emphasizing the importance of change champions, green governance, and stakeholder engagement. This holistic approach offers a valuable theoretical framework for enhancing sustainability practices and organizational performance in the hospitality sector.

This study's methodological contribution is substantial and underscores its reliability and trustworthiness. A robust methodological stance was consistently applied throughout the research, rooted in social constructionism and qualitative case study methodology (Kilani & Kobziev, 2016; Pittaway et al., 2017; Andrews, 2012; Coyle, 2010). These approaches allowed for the exploration of numerous factors and themes related to environmental sustainability strategies in the hotel industry (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Yin, 2011). Notably, the adoption of multiple case studies significantly enhanced the research's external validity, ensuring that findings can be applied beyond individual cases (Rajapaksha & Rajapakse, 2017). This comprehensive methodology ensured the quality and depth of research outcomes, contributing to a well-grounded study that can be relied upon for its validity and trustworthiness (Kilani & Kobziev, 2016; Pittaway et al., 2017).

This study provides crucial practical implications for enhancing environmental sustainability in the Sri Lankan hotel industry. It identifies areas for improvement in existing practices, bridging gaps in theory and literature (Davis, Kee & Newcomer, 2010). Emphasizing the role of change champions, it addresses barriers like strategic investment, employee engagement, management commitment, and proper champion identification (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). The study highlights the need for a culture



promoting change champions and underscores their influence on top management (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018). Additionally, it advocates for strategic investment, employee development, guest engagement, and innovation in sustainability strategies (Visser & Crane, 2010).

While this research has uncovered valuable insights, it is not without limitations. Future research avenues could delve deeper into the economic and social sustainability dimensions of change champions' roles. Additionally, exploring the influence of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) champions and the networking influence of top managers on organizational sustainability performance would enrich the field. Understanding how organizations can systematically develop change champions to drive sustainability performance represents a promising future research agenda.

In conclusion, our study has illuminated the path toward sustainable practices in the Sri Lankan hotel industry. By recognizing the challenges, opportunities, and instrumental role of change champions, we move one step closer to a more sustainable future for this vital sector and, by extension, the broader community and environment.

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