

Sustainable Hospitality and Workforce Diversity: A Study on Inclusive Green Practices in Indian Hotel Industry

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Abstract:

Sustainability is the key to success in the present competitive marketplaces. The Indian hotel industry has witnessed major changes especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study examines the relationship between sustainable hospitality practices and workforce diversity in the Indian hotel industry, focusing on inclusive green practices. The research explores how hotels integrate environmental sustainability with principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion to enhance effectiveness and social responsibility. It analyzes the contribution of a diverse workforce in promoting energy efficiency, waste reduction, green procurement, and community engagement initiatives. A mixed-method approach is adopted, using survey data from hotel employees and managers with qualitative insights from industry experts. The study identifies challenges in implementing inclusive sustainability strategies, including skill gaps, resistance to change, and limited resources. Findings reveal that hotels with inclusive human resource policies demonstrate stronger commitment to sustainable operations and innovation. It concludes that aligning workforce diversity with green management improves service quality, employee engagement, and brand reputation. Practical recommendations are offered for strengthening training, leadership commitment, and inclusive environmental governance across Indian hotels.

Keywords: *Sustainable Hospitality, Workforce Diversity, Inclusive Practices, Green Management, Indian Hotel Industry, Environmental Sustainability*

1. Introduction

Sustainable hospitality is not only an ethical obligation but also a strategic business necessity. Many leading hotel chains are investing in green technologies and environmentally conscious operations. Effective sustainability practices help hotels reduce costs and enhance brand image. According to Jones et al. (2016), sustainability initiatives in hospitality contribute significantly to long-term competitiveness and organizational resilience. Talent and technology are the two major pillars determining the fortune of any enterprise. The global and diverse workforce is the major foundation to foster the culture of creativity and innovation at workplaces. It further leads to the diversity, inclusivity and gender equality (Gaikwad, 2021). The sustainable hospitality has become a fundamental requirement for the global hotel industry

due to rising environmental and social concerns. Hotels today are expected to minimize their ecological footprint while maintaining high standards of service quality and profitability. The concept of sustainability in hospitality includes efficient use of natural resources, reduction of waste, conservation of energy, and ethical business operations. In recent years, travelers have shown greater preference for environmentally responsible hotels and eco-friendly tourism services. This shift in consumer behavior has encouraged hotel organizations to adopt structured green practices and sustainability policies. In India, rapid urbanization and tourism expansion have increased pressure on hotels to operate responsibly. Workforce diversity has emerged as a key organizational factor influencing service excellence in the hospitality sector. Hotels operate in multicultural environments and serve guests from different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. A diverse workforce enables hotels to understand customer expectations more effectively and deliver personalized services. Diversity in the workplace includes differences in gender, age, ethnicity, language, disability, and socio-economic background. Managing such diversity requires inclusive policies, fair employment practices, and supportive organizational culture. Inclusive human resource management helps employees feel respected and valued in their professional roles. In the Indian hotel industry, diversity management is gradually gaining importance as organizations expand globally. Hotels that embrace diversity tend to experience higher employee satisfaction and better team performance. However, lack of awareness and structured policies often limit the benefits of diversity initiatives. Manoharan et al. (2014) argue that identity-conscious diversity management practices enhance organizational effectiveness and service innovation in hospitality organizations.

The success of green practices in hotels largely depends on the involvement and commitment of employees. Sustainability strategies such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and water management require active participation from the workforce. Employees play a crucial role in translating environmental policies into daily operational behavior. Training and development programs on environmental responsibility help build green skills among hotel staff. A diverse and inclusive workforce contributes innovative ideas and creative solutions for sustainable operations. When employees feel included and empowered, they are more likely to support organizational sustainability goals. Human resource practices such as green training, effective communication, performance appraisal, and employee engagement strengthen sustainability implementation. Hotels that integrate sustainability into their organizational culture achieve better environmental and financial outcomes. Kim et al. (2019) emphasize that workforce engagement is a critical determinant of successful sustainability performance in the hospitality industry. The Indian hotel industry is increasingly recognizing the interconnection between sustainability and workforce inclusion. Many hotels are adopting green certifications, renewable energy systems, and community-oriented environmental initiatives. Challenges such as resource constraints, lack of training, and resistance to change continue to affect implementation. A strategic alignment between human resource management and environmental goals is essential for future growth. Strengthening inclusive sustainability practices can improve service quality, employee morale, and organizational reputation. Sharma and Bansal (2020) highlight that sustainable human resource management plays a vital role in enhancing overall performance of Indian hospitality organizations.

2. Background of Study

The hospitality industry worldwide is undergoing rapid transformation due to growing environmental awareness and changing customer expectations. Hotels are major consumers of energy, water, and other natural resources, making them important contributors to environmental impact. Increasing concerns about climate change, pollution, and resource depletion have placed pressure on hotels to adopt

responsible operational practices. International frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals have further emphasized the need for environmentally sustainable business models. In India, the tourism and hospitality sector has expanded significantly over the past decade, leading to greater ecological challenges. As a result, hotel organizations are now expected to integrate sustainability into their core management strategies. Sustainable hospitality is no longer viewed as an optional initiative but as a fundamental requirement for business survival. Green certifications, eco-friendly infrastructure, and responsible waste management are becoming standard practices. However, the success of such initiatives depends on effective organizational commitment and implementation. According to Bohdanowicz and Zientara (2009), environmental sustainability in hotels requires systematic planning, monitoring, and involvement of all stakeholders. Along with environmental concerns, the hospitality industry has also experienced major changes in workforce composition. Hotels employ large numbers of people from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Globalization and increased mobility of labor have further enhanced the diversity of employees working in the hotel sector. Workforce diversity includes differences in gender, age, ethnicity, language, educational background, and physical ability. Inclusive employment practices help hotels create positive work environments and improve service quality. In India, the hospitality workforce increasingly consists of women employees, migrant workers, and individuals from different regions and communities. Yang and Konrad (2011) explain that organizations that implement diversity management practices experience better employee commitment and competitive advantage.

Sustainability and workforce diversity are gradually becoming interconnected priorities within the hospitality sector. Limited awareness, lack of resources, and traditional management approaches often restrict progress in this area. Research indicates that human resource policies play a critical role in strengthening sustainable practices in hotels. Jabbour and Santos (2008) state that environmentally oriented human resource management is essential for achieving organizational sustainability goals. The growing importance of sustainable hospitality and workforce inclusion, there is still limited empirical research in the Indian context. Most existing studies focus either on environmental sustainability or on diversity management separately. Very few studies have examined how inclusive workforce practices influence the adoption of green initiatives in Indian hotels. It is necessary to explore how inclusive human resource policies contribute to environmental performance. This study aims to address this gap by examining sustainable hospitality from the perspective of workforce diversity. As highlighted by Baum et al. (2016), future hospitality research must focus on integrating social inclusion with sustainability to achieve responsible and competitive tourism development.

3. Scope and Significance of Study

The scope of the present study is confined to understanding sustainable hospitality practices in relation to workforce diversity within the Indian hotel industry. The study primarily focuses on hotels operating in major urban and tourist destinations of India where sustainability initiatives are increasingly being implemented. It examines how inclusive human resource policies contribute to the adoption of green practices such as energy conservation, waste management, water efficiency, and community engagement. By concentrating on inclusive green practices, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of sustainability from a social and organizational viewpoint. The analysis is limited to the organized hotel sector and does not include unregistered hospitality units. According to Sloan et al. (2013), the hospitality industry offers significant opportunities for integrating environmental responsibility with human resource development. This study addresses that gap by investigating how inclusive workplaces can strengthen green initiatives in hotels. The findings will be useful for hotel managers and human resource professionals

in designing effective sustainability strategies. Understanding employee attitudes toward sustainability can help organizations develop better training and engagement programs. The research also highlights the importance of diversity in promoting innovative and responsible business practices. In the Indian context, where social and cultural diversity is very high, such insights are particularly valuable. The study contributes to academic literature by providing empirical evidence on inclusive sustainability practices. As stated by Ferdig (2007), organizational sustainability can be achieved only when social inclusion and environmental responsibility are addressed together.

The study emphasizes the role of leadership commitment and employee participation in achieving environmental goals. The outcomes of the study can assist hotel organizations in developing structured policies for green human resource management. It also provides insights for designing training modules that encourage environmentally responsible behavior among employees. Furthermore, the study supports policy makers and tourism authorities in formulating guidelines for sustainable hospitality development. Research by Renwick et al. (2013) suggests that human resource management plays a crucial role in promoting environmental sustainability within organizations. The broader significance of the study extends to social and environmental development goals in India. Sustainable and inclusive hospitality practices contribute directly to national objectives related to responsible tourism, employment generation, and environmental protection. By promoting diversity and equality in the workplace, hotels can support social justice and economic empowerment of marginalized groups. The study also highlights how inclusive green practices align with global sustainability frameworks and responsible business standards. Its findings can encourage hotels to adopt more ethical and community-oriented business models. According to Boley and Uysal (2013), sustainable tourism development requires balancing environmental, social, and economic objectives through inclusive organizational practices.

4. Objectives of Study

- To examine the extent of sustainable hospitality practices adopted by hotels in the Indian hotel industry
- To analyze the role of workforce diversity and inclusion in promoting green and environmentally responsible practices
- To evaluate employee awareness, attitudes, and participation toward sustainability initiatives in hotels
- To identify the challenges faced by hotels in integrating inclusive human resource practices with sustainable operations
- To suggest strategic measures for strengthening inclusive green practices for long-term sustainability in the Indian hospitality sector

5. Review of Literature

Recent hospitality scholarship positions sustainability as a multi-dimensional agenda that includes operational greening, governance, and employee-facing systems rather than isolated “eco” actions. Evidence synthesized across hotel studies shows that green outcomes are strongly shaped by how organizations embed environmental priorities into recruitment, training, performance management, and culture-building practices. This stream of work highlights that sustainability implementation is often constrained by capability gaps, inconsistent leadership commitment, and weak alignment between environmental goals and HR processes. The literature also notes that hotels tend to adopt clusters of practices (e.g., employee engagement plus CSR plus leadership routines) rather than single interventions, because guest-facing service quality depends on coordinated behaviors across departments. Importantly,

studies argue that green HRM effects extend beyond ecological metrics to include employee attitudes, service behaviors, and organizational credibility. As the field matures, scholars increasingly call for tighter theorization and clearer practice typologies to support comparable evidence across contexts (Alreahi et al., 2023).

A second line of research explains how leadership and perceived organizational support catalyze employees' green behaviors in hotels. This work suggests that managers who demonstrate inclusive and environmentally oriented leadership can activate pro-environmental behaviors by strengthening psychological safety, belongingness, and perceived support for green initiatives. Such leadership is linked with outcomes that matter operationally in hotels green innovative work behavior, green knowledge sharing, and service recovery behaviors aligned with sustainability standards. The literature emphasizes that frontline roles become critical transmission points where values convert into visible practices (waste segregation, energy saving routines, responsible guest communication). Studies also highlight mediation mechanisms, arguing that employees are more likely to sustain green behaviors when they interpret leadership signals as genuine organizational commitment rather than symbolic compliance. In this framing, inclusion is not treated as a separate HR objective but as a behavioral driver that helps green norms diffuse across a heterogeneous workforce (Aboramadan et al., 2022).

Parallel to sustainability scholarship, the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) literature in hospitality and tourism has expanded rapidly, mapping themes such as diversity management systems, gender diversity, inclusion climates, and performance implications. Reviews indicate that DEI research is increasingly tied to service innovation and organizational outcomes, with social identity-based explanations frequently used to clarify how group composition and inclusion practices shape attitudes and behaviors. A recurring insight is that “diversity” without “inclusion” can create friction, communication barriers, and perceived unfairness conditions that can undermine both employee well-being and service consistency. Scholars also observe that DEI research has begun to move from descriptive discussions toward more structured evidence using bibliometric and systematic techniques, but still requires stronger integration with operational domains such as sustainability and responsible tourism. Overall, the field points to a clear need for models that connect DEI practices with specific workplace behaviors and performance pathways in hospitality contexts (Koç et al., 2025).

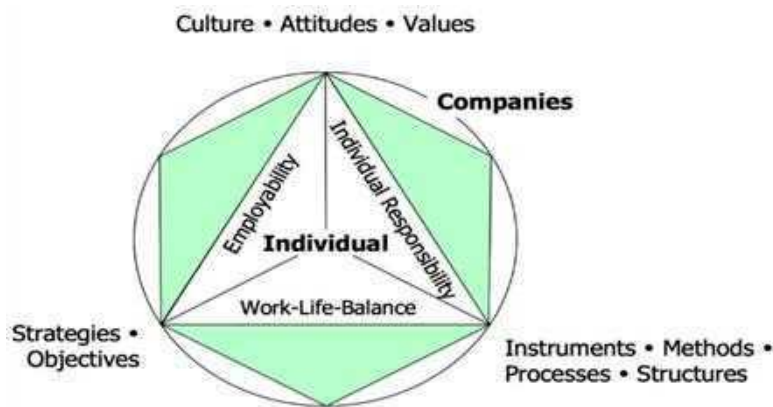
Within the India-linked empirical literature, green HRM is increasingly examined as a mechanism that shapes employees' pro-environmental behaviors and commitment—two factors directly relevant to hotels' day-to-day sustainability execution. Studies suggest that when green HRM practices are present (e.g., training for green routines, evaluation signals that reward eco-responsible conduct), employees demonstrate both task-related and proactive pro-environmental behaviors. This is important because hotels operate with tight process interdependencies, where proactive behaviors (voluntary conservation actions, peer influence, initiative-taking) can materially improve environmental performance beyond basic compliance. The literature also links these behaviors to deeper psychological outcomes such as environmental commitment, implying that green HRM can create durable behavioral norms rather than short-lived campaign effects. Such findings strengthen the argument that sustainability in hotels is an HR-enabled capability, not merely a facilities or engineering function, and they offer a platform for connecting inclusion variables with green behavior outcomes in Indian settings (Bangwal et al., 2025).

6. Discussion and Analysis

The analysis of sustainable hospitality practices in Indian hotels indicates that environmental responsibility is gradually becoming an essential component of organizational strategy. Most organized

hotels have adopted visible green initiatives such as energy-efficient lighting, water conservation systems, waste segregation, and eco-friendly procurement. However, the depth of implementation varies significantly across different categories of hotels. Luxury and international chain hotels demonstrate stronger commitment toward sustainability compared to small and mid-scale properties. The study reveals that sustainability efforts are most effective when they are formally integrated into organizational policies rather than treated as occasional activities. Employee participation plays a decisive role in translating sustainability policies into operational outcomes. Hotels that provide structured training and clear environmental guidelines show higher levels of compliance with green standards. According to Mensah (2014), sustainability in hotels requires not only technological investment but also behavioral change among employees and managers.

Figure 1: Sustainability and Workforce in Tourism



(Source: Baum et al., 2016)

Workforce diversity emerges as a critical factor influencing the success of inclusive green practices. The findings suggest that hotels employing diverse teams benefit from broader perspectives and more innovative problem-solving approaches. Gender diversity, cultural inclusion, and equal opportunity policies contribute to a positive organizational climate that supports sustainability initiatives. Employees from varied backgrounds bring unique experiences that help hotels design creative solutions for energy saving, waste reduction, and community engagement. Hotels with transparent and fair human resource practices demonstrate stronger alignment between diversity management and sustainability goals. Research by Baum et al. (2016) supports this observation by emphasizing that inclusive employment practices strengthen organizational performance and service quality in hospitality settings. Employee awareness and engagement toward sustainability programs differ considerably among hotels. The study shows that where management actively communicates environmental goals, employees display greater responsibility toward green practices. Training programs, incentives, and recognition for eco-friendly behavior positively influence employee attitudes. Conversely, in hotels where sustainability is not clearly linked with performance evaluation, employee participation remains limited. The analysis also indicates that frontline staff plays a crucial role in implementing sustainable practices, as they interact directly with guests and manage daily operations. Therefore, building a culture of sustainability requires continuous education and motivation at all organizational levels. Many respondents emphasized that sustainability initiatives become successful only when employees feel personally connected to environmental values. As noted by Renwick et al. (2013), green human resource management practices significantly enhance employee commitment to organizational sustainability objectives.

The several challenges continue to affect the effective integration of workforce diversity with sustainable hospitality practices. Limited financial resources, lack of expert training, and resistance to organizational change remain major obstacles, particularly in small and medium hotels. The study also identifies gaps in policy implementation, where sustainability and diversity are treated as separate agendas rather than interrelated strategies. Many hotels focus on external green branding while giving less attention to internal employee inclusion and participation. The analysis suggests that long-term sustainability in the Indian hotel industry depends on a holistic approach that combines environmental responsibility with social inclusion. Leadership commitment, continuous training, and supportive organizational culture are necessary for achieving this integration. Overall, the findings confirm that inclusive green practices offer significant benefits for hotels in terms of efficiency, reputation, and employee satisfaction. According to Jabbour and Santos (2008), organizations that align human resource management with environmental strategies achieve more sustainable and competitive business outcomes.

7. Findings of Study

- The study reveals that sustainable hospitality practices are gaining gradual acceptance within the Indian hotel industry, particularly among organized and chain hotels. Most of the surveyed hotels have adopted basic green measures such as energy conservation, water management, and waste reduction programs. However, the level of implementation differs according to hotel size, category, and management commitment. The findings indicate that environmental sustainability is still viewed primarily as a cost-saving strategy rather than as a comprehensive organizational philosophy. Many hotels focus on visible green practices but lack long-term sustainability planning. Effective monitoring and evaluation systems for environmental performance are also found to be limited in several properties. According to Chan and Hsu (2016), hotels that adopt systematic sustainability frameworks achieve more consistent and measurable environmental outcomes.
- Workforce diversity is found to have a positive influence on the adoption of inclusive green practices in hotels. The study identifies those hotels employing a diverse workforce benefit from improved creativity, better problem-solving and enhanced customer service. Gender-inclusive workplaces and culturally diverse teams show greater openness toward environmental initiatives. Employees from different backgrounds contribute varied ideas for improving resource efficiency and guest engagement in sustainability programs. Where inclusive human resource practices are present, employee cooperation in sustainability initiatives is significantly higher. As suggested by Yang and Konrad (2011), organizations that manage diversity effectively experience stronger employee commitment and innovative capacity.
- Another important finding of the study is that employee awareness and participation are critical determinants of successful sustainability implementation. Hotels that regularly conduct training programs on environmental responsibility show better employee involvement in green activities. Staff members who clearly understand the purpose and benefits of sustainability are more willing to follow eco-friendly practices in their daily tasks. The research indicates that leadership support and internal communication strongly influence employee attitudes toward sustainability. In hotels where managers actively encourage participation, employees demonstrate higher levels of motivation and ownership of environmental goals. On the other hand, lack of recognition and incentives reduces employee interest in sustainability programs. The findings confirm that green human resource management practices such as training, appraisal, and rewards are essential for creating a pro-environmental workforce. Renwick et al. (2013) emphasize that employee engagement is a central element in achieving organizational sustainability objectives.

- The study also identifies several challenges that limit the integration of workforce diversity with sustainable hospitality practices. Major barriers include insufficient financial resources, inadequate technical knowledge, and limited availability of skilled trainers. Many hotels lack formal systems to connect diversity initiatives with environmental management programs. Resistance to change and traditional management attitudes continue to slow down progress in this area (Jabbour & Santos (2008). Smaller hotels in particular struggle to invest in both sustainability technologies and employee development programs. The findings suggest that without strong leadership commitment, inclusive green practices remain fragmented and short-term. Despite these challenges, the overall results indicate that hotels that successfully combine diversity management with sustainability efforts achieve better operational efficiency and employee satisfaction. aligning human resource strategies with environmental goals is essential for building truly sustainable organizations.

8. Conclusion

The study concludes that sustainable hospitality and workforce diversity are deeply interconnected dimensions that collectively shape the future competitiveness of the Indian hotel industry. Environmental sustainability is no longer a peripheral activity but has become an essential strategic requirement for hotels. Green practices such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and responsible resource management are increasingly adopted across different categories of hotels. However, the effectiveness of these practices depends largely on organizational commitment and employee involvement. Hotels that integrate sustainability into their policies and daily operations achieve better economic and environmental outcomes. Diverse and inclusive workplaces encourage creativity, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving, all of which are essential for effective sustainability implementation. Employees from different backgrounds contribute unique perspectives that help hotels develop practical solutions to environmental challenges. When diversity is supported by fair and inclusive human resource policies, employees demonstrate higher commitment toward organizational sustainability goals. Conversely, lack of structured diversity management limits the potential benefits of a heterogeneous workforce. The findings highlight that inclusion-oriented leadership and equitable workplace practices are necessary for mobilizing diverse employees toward common environmental objectives. Training, awareness programs, performance evaluation, and employee engagement mechanisms directly influence the success of green initiatives in hotels. Hotels that invest in green human resource practices are more likely to develop environmentally responsible employee behavior. The research indicates that sustainability must be integrated into recruitment, training, and appraisal systems to produce long-term behavioral change. Leadership commitment and effective internal communication are also vital for creating a culture of sustainability. Green human resource management is fundamental for transforming sustainability strategies into everyday workplace practices. The Indian hotel industry has significant potential to advance sustainable development through the integration of workforce diversity and green management. While many hotels have made initial progress, there is a need for more structured and strategic approaches to inclusive sustainability. Policymakers and hotel managers must recognize that environmental responsibility and social inclusion are complementary rather than separate agendas. The study recommends that hotels adopt comprehensive policies that align diversity, equity, and inclusion with environmental objectives. Such integration will enable the hospitality sector to contribute meaningfully to national and global sustainability goals. The organizations that align human resource strategies with environmental priorities are better positioned to achieve sustainable and competitive growth.

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