2010

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Publication Details

D'souza, S., McKechnie, D. S. & Grant, J. 2010, 'Colouring the workplace green: considering the shade employees see', International Conference on Sustainability in Business 2010, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia,

COLOURING THE WORKPLACE GREEN: CONSIDERING THE SHADE EMPLOYEES SEE

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability, such as green initiatives, may be considered from two perspectives: (1) social marketing whereby societal value is a priority and (2) financial viability wherein stakeholder value is a concern. However, equally important to companies who seek to colour the workplace green is employee buy-in. This research, set in Dubai, UAE, sought answers about the support for green measures in the workplace. It was guided by three objectives: (1) to what extent are employees willing to contribute to an energy and/or environmentally friendly workplace; (2) to what extent do employees perceive company commitment towards a green workplace, and (3) what initiatives, if any, would encourage employees to participate in green activities. The empirical findings indicate that employees are critiquing company actions. They suggest that more may be done including education activities such as workshops and seminars for information as well as competitions across departments. Monetary rewards were preferred by those youngest and oldest in the workplace. The contribution to knowledge is made more significant given that the UAE scores exceptionally high on carbon footprint per capita ratings. The focus of the study was kept intentionally broad for data interpretation to identify potential issues which could further the research beyond this exploratory stage. Respondents were approached at various venues, including some in their workplace presenting some limitations due to sample size. Future research may pursue the opportunity for companies to use internal marketing activities if they seek to colour the workplace a deeper shade of green.

KEYWORDS: Internal Marketing; Green Initiatives: Workplace; Employees: Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability, such as green initiatives, has been considered from two perspectives: (1) social marketing whereby societal value is a priority and (2) financial viability wherein stakeholder value is a concern. However, equally important to companies who seek to colour the workplace green is employee buy-in. Yet, research that addresses the employee viewpoint has been slow to gain attention (Junnila, 2007).

This research, set in Dubai, UAE, sought answers about the support for green measures in the workplace. It was guided by three objectives: (1) to what extent are employees willing to contribute to an energy and/or environmentally friendly workplace; (2) what initiatives, if any, would encourage employees to participate in green activities; and (3) to what extent do employees perceive company commitment towards a green workplace. Notably, the Dubai workforce is comprised of expatriates from a multitude of nationalities and diverse backgrounds. This, along with age segmentation, contributes to a study where respondents may be categorized by the two demographic factors to identify similarities and differences in their viewpoints. The contribution to knowledge is made more significant given that the UAE scores exceptionally high on carbon footprint per capita ratings. The focus of the study was kept intentionally broad for data interpretation to identify potential issues which could further the research beyond this exploratory stage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Companies or consumers have typically been the unit of analysis in green marketing studies. When companies have been the focus, the business perspective has been an important element. For example, early research that addressed the reasons that companies were likely to adopt green measures identified that the extent to which cost would impact financial wellbeing was a key factor in management's decisions (Kassaye, 2001). Company size was also relevant given that larger firms could sustain more expense and thus pursued green initiatives for the societal value whereas small firms looked first to cost. More recently the discussion has shifted to the influence that various stakeholders have on companies' pursuit of green marketing strategies (Rivera-Camino, 2007). Notably the results suggest that external stakeholders play a significant role as companies are reminded to pursue green marketing strategies that provide competitive advantage in their respective marketplace.

A common topic when consumers have been the focus is the attitudes and behaviors they display towards green measures. Cleveland et al (2005), for example, link attitudes and personality characteristics of urban consumers to suggest that pro-environment behaviours may be identified. Other studies have addressed how a company or institution may cut costs by educating stakeholders about energy conservation. For example, Kahler (2003) used student dormitory rooms at a university as the study setting. The findings provided information about the value of green measures for other stakeholders within the institution. Additionally, Peterson et al (2007) found that students' behavior towards green measures could be influenced if informed about the contribution that could be made to savings, financial and energy, by their support for the university initiatives.

Although the green literature has become increasingly robust, the gap that has been slow to close is the views of employees towards environmentally-friendly initiatives that companies introduce to the workplace. Junnila (2007) used a multi-case approach to address energy conservation by end-users in the workplace. The study results note that user behavior towards green measures must be managed. This suggests that companies should not assume that individuals will adopt conservation practices within the workplace; rather, extending encouragement and supporting educational efforts that promote an organization culture that includes green can contribute to cost savings and profitability. Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews (2009) propose that green atmospherics in a service environment may contribute to worker morale just as consumers may be influenced by green measures within the service setting. The value of such studies is the shift to consider employees as internal customers and a target group for companies engaging in green marketing strategies.

METHODOLOGY

This study developed from two expert interviews about green measures and sustainability in Dubai development projects (D'Souza et al, 2009). The topic of employee buy-in arose in both conversations and contributed to this exploratory study. The survey instrument was developed with general questions and statements. The questionnaire included demographics and information about practices within the organizations where the respondents are employed. It was piloted and revised before it was taken to the field.

Respondents

The gender split for those who participated in the study is 61 percent males and 39 percent females. This is representative of the working population as the country has a much higher number of males in the workforce than females. Additionally, the country is a nation of expatriates and the respondents' nationalities reflect the international demographics: Indians – 48 percent; sub-continent, African and Middle East countries – 19 percent; Europe/North America/UK – 9 per cent; and Austral-Asia – 24 percent. Notably, when the nationalities are considered on a country-by-country basis, two had the greatest respondent percentages: India (48 percent) and Philippines (22 percent). The demographics within the Dubai population support these numbers as people from these two countries are heavily represented within the trade workforce. Age was limited to four groups given that the country has policies about age limitations within workplace professions. The groups included those less than 25 years (10 percent), 25-34 (43 percent), 35-44 (31 percent), 45 and older (16 percent).

Industry

Respondents work in various industry sectors including: health, 5 percent; education, 11 percent; finance, 33 percent; real estate, 3 percent, hospitality, 1 percent. The 'other' option accounted for 47 percent with respondents answering publishing and media, tourism, construction, pharmaceutical, shipping, manufacturing

and event & exhibition. Job functions are also quite diverse including: finance, 15 percent; marketing, 11 percent; accounting, 20 percent; management, 8 percent; HR, 6 percent; IT, 7 percent. Within the 'other' option for job field (33 percent) respondents answered journalism & editorial, photography, banking, logistics, administration, business development, customer service and operations.

Asked whether organizations for which they work have an environmental policy, respondents answered yes (66 percent), no (19 percent), not sure (15 percent) although the majority said they would like to learn more about adopting 'green' in the workplace (89 percent). When asked if their organizations have a reward program that encourages energy-efficient behavior, respondents answered yes (26 percent), no (63 percent), not sure (11 percent).

RESULTS

Objective 1: to what extent are employees willing to contribute to an energy and/or environmentally friendly workplace;

Table 1 includes the results for the five statements which refer to the green activities through which respondents may be able to contribute to an environmentally friendly workplace. The responses are weighted to the agreement options with 70 percent of the study participants saying they believe in green activities although only 38 percent strongly agree to the statement that they recycle at the workplace and only 46 percent strongly agree that they try to minimize waste. Using both sides of printer/copying paper had the higher strongly agree responses (52 percent) compared to saving electricity (44 percent) although the overall percentages for these activities are similar across the agree/disagree dichotomy. Cronbach alpha for the five statements is .740.

Table 1: Percentage agreement with statements that support objective 1.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I try to minimize waste in my workplace.	46%	49%	4%	1%
I make an effort to save electricity at my workplace.	44%	45%	11%	---
I make use of double sided printing/copying o reduce paper usage.	52%	37%	10%	1%
I recycle at my workplace.	38%	47%	12%	3%
I believe in green activities.	70%	30%	---	---

Within gender, the agree responses for most statements had higher percentages by females than did those of the males. Females, more than males (98 percent to 93 percent) try to minimize waste. Regarding saving electricity, 94 percent of females agree compared to 85 percent of males. The statement 'I recycle at my workplace' was chi square significant, $p<.05$, with gender results of 94 percent females and 80 percent males stated agree. Only the issue of reducing paper usage by using double sided printing/copying drew more agree responses from males (91 percent) than from females (88 percent).

The results for nationality cross-tabulated with the five statements of objective one are shown in Table 2. A high percentage of respondents for all nationalities indicate agreement with each of the statements. The two with the highest agreement percentages are 'I try to minimize waste in my workplace' (93 percent and greater) and 'I believe in green activities' (100 percent) from all nationalities. Overall, the Austral-Asia group, which is predominately those of Philippines nationality, had more agree responses than the other nationalities. Responses for the cross-tabulation of 'my organization has an environmental policy' and 'I recycle at my workplace' show diverse agree results across the nationality groups: India, 94 percent; Sub-continent/Middle East/Africa, 81 percent; Europe/NA/UK, 75 percent; and Austral-Asia, 94 percent.

Table 2: Percentage agreement with statements cross-tabulated to nationality

	India	Sub-continent, Middle East, Africa	Europe, North America, UK	Austral-Asia
I try to minimize waste in my workplace	93%	96%	100%	97%
I make an effort to save electricity at my workplace	85%	78%	100%	100%
I make use of double-sided printing / copying to reduce paper usage	88%	86%	82%	97%
I recycle at my workplace	87%	76%	82%	90%
I believe in green activities	100%	100%	100%	100%
My organization has an environmental policy and I recycle at my workplace	94%	81%	75%	94%

Table 3 summarizes the percentage of agree responses for each of the statements cross-tabulated with age. The findings show that those 45 years and older 'agree' less often than do those of the other age groups. Those under 25 years answered with only 75 percent who agree that they make an effort to save electricity. Regarding the age groups, 25 to 34 years and 35 to 44 years, the percentage of agree responses are consistent across statements.

Table 3: Percentage agreement with statements cross-tabulated to age

	Under 25 yrs	25-34 years	35-44 years	45 yrs & older
I try to minimize waste in my workplace	100%	98%	92%	90%
I make an effort to save electricity at my workplace	75%	93%	90%	85%
I make use of double-sided printing / copying to reduce paper usage	92%	94%	92%	70%
I recycle at my workplace	91%	87%	94%	65%
I believe in green activities	100%	100%	100%	100%
My organization has an environmental policy and I recycle at my workplace	100%	91%	92%	77%

Objective 2: to what extent do employees perceive company commitment towards a green workplace.

Table 4 shows the percentages across the response options for the five statements relevant to objective 2. For all, the results skew to the strongly agree and agree categories. However, disagreement is noted for 'I come across unnecessary use of lighting in the workplace' (18 percent) and 'My workplace provides facilities for recycling' (14 percent). The two statements that elicit an opinion about green activities – an automated lighting system and renewable energy resource systems - show equal strongly agree (53) and agree (41) percentages despite that they appeared at different locations on the questionnaire. Only 38 percent of respondents strongly support the notion that economical factors affect organizations' green investment decisions compared to 54 percent whose agreement is more moderate.

Table 4: Percentage agreement with statements that support objective 2.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I come across unnecessary use of lighting in the workplace.	36	44	18	2
An automated lighting system contributes to energy efficiency.	53	41	5	1
Renewable energy resource systems (solar power energy) are effective.	53	41	6	---
My workplace provides facilities for recycling.	38	43	14	5
Economical factors (i.e. recessions) affect organizations' decisions in investing in green equipment.	38	54	8	---

The perception of respondents, grouped by nationality, towards company commitment to green activities is shown in Table 5. Between 79 and 82 percent of respondents, regardless of nationality, observe unnecessary lighting in their workplace. Additionally, the percentages that agree to the statement 'My workplace provides facilities for recycling' range between 73 percent for those from Europe, North American and UK, to 83 percent from Sub-continent, Middle East and African countries. Those from India (95 percent) and Austral-Asia (93 percent) take the position that economic factors affect organizations' decisions about investing in green while only 80 percent of those in the Europe, North America and UK group agree with this reason. The results for the cross-tabulation that the respondents' workplace has an environtmental policy and provides facilities for recycling are between 68 percent for the Austral-Asia group and 75 percent for the Europe, North American and UK segment.

Table 5: Percentage agreement with objective 2 statements cross-tabulated with nationality

	India	Sub-continent, Middle East, Africa	Europe, North America, UK	Austral-Asia
I come across unnecessary use of lighting in the workplace.	79	82	80	79
My workplace provides facilities for recycling.	81	83	73	77
Economical factors (i.e. recessions) affect organizations' decisions in investing in green equipment.	95	86	80	93
My workplace has an environmental policy and my workplace provides facilities for recycling	69	74	75	68

Age of respondents (Table 6) indicates that those youngest (under 25 years) and oldest (45 years & older) are generally more observant of green initiatives in the workplace although those in the two older groups view economic factors as an impact on green decisions (35-44 years, 97 percent and 45 years and older, 95 percent) more than the younger segment (82 percent).

Respondents were asked to indicate the factors that may be a deterrent to companies investing in renewable energy resources (Table 7). The mean and standard deviation results rank the factors as price/cost – 1st, lack of knowledge – 2nd, sourcing difficulty – 3rd, lack of choice – 4th, no strong benefit – 5th and no management support – 6th. When the data is analyzed using nationality as the segmentation, then the three groups – (1) India, (2) Sub-continent, Middle East and Africa and (3) Austral-Asia suggest price/cost and lack of knowledge

are the two most relevant factors. The reverse is the view of the Europe, North America and UK group wherein lack of knowledge is first and price/cost is second. According to age segmentation, those 45 years and older consider lack of knowledge is first with price/cost being the second most relevant factor. The other three age groups indicate the reverse wherein price/cost is first and lack of knowledge is second.

Table 6: Percentage agreement with objective 2 statements cross-tabulated with age

	Under 25 yrs	25-34 years	35-44 years	45 yrs & older
I come across unnecessary use of lighting in the workplace.	91	77	87	90
My workplace provides facilities for recycling.	92	82	80	80
Economical factors (i.e. recessions) affect organizations' decisions in investing in green equipment.	82	89	97	95
My workplace has an environmental policy and my workplace provides facilities for recycling	90	91	97	93

Table 7: Investment-deterrent factors

		India	Sub-cont, ME, Africa	Europe, NA, UK	Austral-Asia	Under 25 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45 yrs & older
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Price/cost	1.47 (.501)	1.42 (.498)	1.48 (.511)	1.55 (.522)	1.53 (.507)	1.42 (.515)	1.41 (.496)	1.56 (.502)	1.50 (.513)
Lack of choice	1.85 (.360)	1.81 (.393)	1.78 (.422)	2.00 (.000)	1.90 (.305)	1.92 (.289)	1.81 (.392)	1.90 (.307)	1.80 (.410)
Sourcing difficulty	1.82 (.382)	1.78 (.418)	1.96 (.209)	1.91 (.302)	1.80 (.407)	1.75 (.452)	1.80 (.407)	1.85 (.366)	1.90 (.308)
No strong benefit	1.86 (.344)	1.85 (.363)	1.87 .344	1.91 (.302)	1.87 (.346)	1.83 (.389)	1.85 (.359)	1.90 (.307)	1.85 (.366)
Lack of knowledge	1.55 (.499)	1.58 (.498)	1.48 (.511)	1.45 (.522)	1.60 (.498)	1.58 (.515)	1.56 (.502)	1.59 (.498)	1.45 (.510)
No management support	1.86 (.353)	1.85 (.363)	1.87 (.344)	1.64 (.505)	1.93 (2.54)	1.83 (.389)	1.89 (.317)	1.85 (.366)	1.80 (.410)

Objective 3: What initiatives, if any, would encourage employees to participate in green activities?

As noted earlier in this paper, answers to the statement that respondents' organizations offer a reward program that encourages energy-efficient behavior were yes (26 percent), no (63 percent) and not sure (11 percent. Table 8, following shows the results for the statement 'Motivating employees to recycle through various reward programs are effective'. The strongest agreement percentages were from the respondents in the India (45 percent), Sub-continent, Middle East, Africa (57 percent) and Austral-Asia (50 percent) groups. When segmented by age, those in the 25-34 category indicated the highest percentage of strongly agree (66 percent).

Table 8: 'Motivating employees to recycle through various reward programs are effective' cross-tabulated with nationality and age.

		India	Sub-cont, ME, Africa	Europe, NA, UK	Austral-Asia	Under 25 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45 yrs & older
Strongly Agree	45%	45%	57%	10%	50%	27%	66%	31%	30%
Agree	45%	43%	30%	70%	50%	64%	30%	56%	50%
Disagree	9%	10%	13%	20%	---	9%	4%	10%	20%
Strongly Disagree	1%	2%	---	---	---	---	---	3%	---

When asked which program would be the best motivator, respondents who said their nationality is Indian or Sub-continent, Middle East, Africa along with those who said their age is 25 years and older had similar responses towards monetary reward schemes and educational seminars (Table 9). The variation between the two options varied somewhat for age segmentation but overall, respondents indicated that either initiative would contribute to positive action. Notably, those from Europe, North America and UK overwhelmingly answered for money reward as did those in the 25 years of age and under group, with inter-departmental competitions as their second choice. Respondents from Austral-Asia, of which the largest nationality group within this category are of Filipino descent, indicated their preference for educational seminars over money.

Table 9: Motivation program preference cross-tabulated with nationality and age

		India	Sub-cont, ME, Africa	Europe, NA, UK	Austral-Asia	Under 25 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45 yrs & older
Monetary Reward Schemes	39$	42%	39%	55%	27%	58%	39%	33%	40%
Educational Seminars	42%	37%	39%	9%	67%	8%	43%	49%	50%
Inter-departmental Competitions	19%	20%	22%	36%	7%	34%	18%	18%	10%

DISCUSSION

As expected for objective 1, the results were heavily skewed to the agreement options for each question. However, when assessed on the basis of strongly agree, agree then the findings suggest that employees do not overwhelmingly embrace green activities. Given the attention that environmental issues receive in media and entertainment (movie: An Inconvenient Truth), it is surprising to find that employees are not more green-focused in the workplace. An argument could be made here that employees do not regard green actions on the job as making a contribution to the environment, generally, but may consider their lack of green focus as a swipe at the organization, specifically. If this is the case, then their views towards their employer may supersede their regard for the environment. More research into this issue is necessary.

Gender results indicate that females are more likely to adopt/practice green activities than men. However, there is marginal difference between the genders suggesting that participating in green initiatives is applicable to all in the workplace and not the domain of one gender compared to the other.

The results for nationality cross-tabulated with the five statements of objective one suggest that some respondents may not associate saving electricity and paper as green activities. The agree responses for these statements are surprisingly low compared to the 100 percent acknowledgement that respondents believe in green activities. Additionally, the results for the cross-tabulation of 'my organization has an environmental policy' and 'I recycle at my workplace' suggest some underlying issues within companies where two nationality groups

indicate agreement at the 81 percent and 75 percent levels respectively. Notably, the lowest percentage is from respondents whose nationality can be identified with developed countries' cultures including Europe, North America and the UK. Respondents appear to be saying that their company has a policy but they do not always follow it nor do they buy-in to the green activities despite that they believe in green initiatives.

Responses for age suggest anomalies in the responses of those 45 years and older. For example, respondents answered 100% that they agree with green activities. Yet, within organizations that have an environmental policy, only 77 percent said that they recycle at the workplace. The results indicate that other issues may be impacting green behaviour in the workplace wherein employees either do not support company initiatives or the means for fulfilling environmental actions are not provided by the company despite that an affirmative policy is in place. The extent to which the results for the older age group differ from the other categories indicates opportunities for further research.

Interestingly, when the respondents are grouped by nationality, the views towards company's commitment to green initiatives (objective 2) suggest that employees are aware of actions being taken. Given the results for objective 1 wherein respondents do not appear to buy-in to the green policies within the workplace, the results suggest that employees may be assessing whether companies 'walk the talk' or just 'talk the talk' and the actions they take are predicated on their view of company commitment.

When the respondents are grouped by age, the results indicate that those older may consider influences on business, such as economical factors, as issues that influence company's decisions towards green policies. In short, those older may see 'the big picture' that green initiatives require resource commitments, such as financial or human, which must be addressed in any policy decisions. Those just entering the workplace, age 25 years and younger, may not have had exposure to business complexities and thus base their views on idealism more than realism.

Generally, respondents from developing and emerging markets indicate price/cost as the primary concern whereas those from developed nations suggest that lack of knowledge is the greater influence on company commitment. The explanation may be that those in the latter group have had more exposure to green measures and consider that initiatives do not have to be a financial encumbrance given that actions taken by individuals can make a difference. The results for this objective suggest education opportunities for management and employees in the workplace.

Generally, respondents indicated that reward schemes to motivate recycling behavior in the workplace would be effective. However, the support for the notion varied across the strongly agree and agree options. Those from the developed nations within Europe, North America and the UK were somewhat hesitant which suggests that they may have had moderate success with rewards and/or incentives in prior experiences. Not surprisingly for the Dubai workforce, monetary rewards were the preferred incentive across nationalities, except for those from Austral-Asia nationality group. Interestingly, those from Europe, North America and UK did not want educational seminars which may reflect their previous exposure to green issues. As for age, those respondents who are older than 25 years indicate a preference for seminars which may reflect possible concern for environmental protection in the future.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Admittedly this exploratory study has limitations to be addressed in future research. First, the sample size is small which suggests that the results may not be generalized across all workplace settings. Future research may focus on specific companies and address the internal marketing to employees or increase the sample size and discuss the views about sustainability and green measures within industries or within the overall business environment of a region. A second limitation is the exploratory nature of this research which required the survey instrument to be broad in scope. Future research may narrow the research question and objectives to specific issues that may be of interest to companies and their internal marketing efforts. Social marketing, while external, has value when targeted to the internal customers.

CONCLUSION

This research, set in Dubai, UAE, sought answers about the support for green measures in the workplace. It was guided by three objectives: (1) to what extent are employees willing to contribute to an energy and/or environmentally friendly workplace; (2) to what extent do employees perceive company commitment towards a green workplace, and (3) what initiatives, if any, would encourage employees to participate in green activities. The empirical findings indicate that employees appear to be critiquing company actions. They suggest that more may be done including monetary rewards, education activities such as workshops and seminars for information as well as competitions across departments. Monetary rewards were preferred by those youngest and oldest in the workplace.

The contribution to knowledge is made more significant given that the UAE scores exceptionally high on carbon footprint per capita ratings. However, equally notable in this research is that the views held by those in the workplace are potentially distinctive across nationality groups and age groups. For instance, those whose nationality is from developed countries appear less likely to accept price/cost as a reason for companies not to participate in green initiatives. These respondents indicate that lack of knowledge may be the reason. The suggestion is that this group is more familiar with green measures which may be undertaken and thus, are more knowledgeable about the activities that both individuals and companies can adopt.

Overall, respondents indicate their support for green activities in the workplace, which answers the research question guiding this study. Thus, in an emerging market setting such as Dubai, then companies should have no reason not to pursue environmentally-friendly practices as employee buy-in is possible and likely.

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