



Environmental Management Practices of an Apparel Manufacturer in Sri Lanka: A Critique

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Environmental degradation considered as one of the critical issues in the current world. To respond to this issue, organizations and businesses around the world seriously focus on environmental protection and management nowadays than before. Organizations strongly committed to adapt several sustainable environmental management practices and initiatives to prove their environmental concern. Meanwhile, it should be noticed that some organizations started pacing towards green washing declaration processes. In this sense, there is a need to explore and identify the sustainable environmental management practices which are actually practiced by the organizations.

Hence, this paper aims to report existing sustainable environmental management practices of the organization and to find out the evidence to support the existing sustainable environmental management practices into practice. In order to achieve the study objectives, secondary data were collected mainly from the published sustainability reports of the selected apparel company for the last two years (2013/2014 and 2014/2015). Further, researchers employed the observation method to confirm whether this company is really carrying out the environmental practices which were reported in their sustainability reports or not. The researchers have identified and highlighted several sustainable environmental management practices under the three main categories such as energy conservation-related practices, water conservation-related practices and earth

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conservation-related practices through the sustainability reports of the company. Moreover, through the observation, researchers have confirmed that this company is really carrying out the energy conservation-related practices, water conservation-related practices and earth conservation-related practices which were reported in their sustainability reports. This study should be useful to the academics and practitioners to understand actual sustainable environmental management practices of the organizations.

Keywords: Environmental management; greenwashing; observation; organization.

1. INTRODUCTION

More than a century of industrial development has come at price: global warming, ozone depletion, air and water pollution, soil erosion and deforestation are now widely recognized as global environmental problems demanding immediate solutions [1]. In this sense, some researchers argued that organizations are mainly responsible for these environmental problems [2,3]. Hence, organizations are increasingly required to focus on environmental protection and management nowadays than before. Further, contemporary firms are faced with many pressures from stakeholders and shareholders to develop environmentally responsible activities [4] to ensure environmental sustainability. Further, Jabbour and Santos [5] argued that considering environmental management has become essential for determining the survival of organizations. Therefore, many businesses are implementing a proactive, strategic tool known as an environmental management system to gain a competitive advantage [6]. According to Jabbour and Santos [5] environmental performance considered as the performance of environmental management systems and the development of environmentally friendly products.

Rising environmental awareness has led public actors and regulatory bodies to expand the corpus of environmental law and has led firms to invest in their environmental management systems to improve their reputation and reduce the risk of environmental disasters [7]. Given the present situation, organizations have to find out ways and techniques to deal with a reduction in ecological footprints besides dealing with economic issues [8]. Most firms are nowadays committed to reducing their environmental footprint, in efforts to reduce the negative environmental impact of business activities [9]. Further, organizations focus on environmental management in their strategy formulation and implementation to gain a competitive advantage and improve reputation. In contrast, even some of the organizations started engaging in greenwashing process as a false reflection, via

portraying dramatic responses to reach the expected competitive advantage [10].

The business community is now in search of an eco-friendly business model [11]. Therefore, organizations must pay great attention on identifying and implement the environmental initiatives and practices to achieve significant reductions in their environmental footprint. In this context, nowadays organizations are practising various innovative environmental initiatives and practices to reduce the negative environmental impact as well as enhance the positive environmental impact to gain a competitive advantage.

In Sri Lankan context, the apparel industry is one of the key contributors to enhance economic activities of the country. Good industrial practices in labour management and environmental management have made Sri Lanka as an attractive destination for apparels made under ethical labor and environmental condition [12]. For the apparel industry, focusing on environmental management considered as the key requirement to gain the exported benefits and other benefits. Hence, apparel organizations in Sri Lanka, are driving continuous improvement in the environmental management system to align with the international and local environmental standards which leads gain a competitive advantage.

Thus, identifying and exploring the environmental practices and initiatives will have useful implications for academics and practitioners in his field. Further, apparel organizations in Sri Lanka, report several environmental practices and initiatives in their sustainability report as well as annual report to show their environmental concern. Hence, there is a need to find the evidence, whether these organizations really practising the environmental practices which were mentioned in their annual reports as well as sustainability reports.

In recent years, number of scholars have contributed to the understanding of

environmental management [5,9,13]. Even though, number of studies carried out in the environmental management field, there is only little research that has been focused on qualitative approach [14,15]. Most of the studies in this field were quantitative studies. Hence, there is a methodological gap existing in the environmental management field. Hence, in order to fulfill this methodological gap, this study employed observational method to identify and explore the existing sustainable environmental management practices. The observational method is really fruitful in providing deeper results [16]. This paper has considered the above considerations in deciding its objectives. Hence, the objectives of this study are to report existing sustainable management practices of the company and to find the evidence to support the existing sustainable environmental management practices into practice

Rest of this article is structured as follows. We begin with a discussion on the methodology adopted and then we present the findings and discussion of the study. Finally, it ends up with the conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Environmental Orientation of Organizations

Many have embraced the mantra of sustainable development. Organizations need to improve their economic, environmental and social performances in order to achieve the goal of sustainable development. Therefore, organizations have seen a growing emphasis on environmental emphasis on the environmental orientation of the organization. Corporate environmentalism is the process by which organizations address environmental issues and develop environmental management strategies to improve the environmental performance of the organizations. In this context, Banerjee [17] has defined the environmental orientation of organization as managerial perceptions of the importance of environmental issues facing their organization and organization's responsiveness to external stakeholders. According to Banerjee [1] environmental orientation of organization refers to the notion of organization's responsibility towards the environment, the importance of recognizing the impact of an organization has on the environment and the need to minimize such impact. Moreover, the environmental orientation of organization

involves respecting and caring for the environment and being responsive to external stakeholders as well as being good corporate citizens [1]. Research has also stated that the environmental orientation of organization is the recognition by managers of the importance of environmental issues facing their organization [18]. In addition, Benerjee et al. [18] have identified two types of environmental orientation such as internal environmental orientation and external environmental orientation. Internal environmental orientation reflects an organization's internal values, standards of ethical behavior, and commitment to environmental protection. External environmental orientation of an organization refers to the aspects of an organization's environmental orientation that affect its relationship with external constituencies, such as financial or community stakeholders.

Environmental orientation is defined as the extent to which managers of the firm recognize the importance of its environmental problems. External environmental orientation refers to the firm's attitude toward environmental conservation that may influence its relationships with external stakeholders, including suppliers, government, and community [19]. Previous studies suggested that the importance of environmental orientation has been realized [20-22].

According to Cekanavicious, Bazyte, and Dicmonaite [23] environmental practices of an organization as follows: (1) green packaging, (2) natural ingredients/products, (3) eco labeling, (4) green building, (5) eco cleaning, (6) less printing, (7) use of public transportation, (8) turning off electric appliances, (9) waste sorting, (10) no smoking in the work place, and (11) seminars about green business.

According to Jabbar and Abid [24] there are four reasons for why organizations should adopt environmental management practices. They are: (1) Ethical: as it's their duty to protect the world, (2) Economic: conserving resources and energy means savings cost, (3) Legal: to avoid the government legal actions, (4) Commercial: a large number of organizations are taking environmental management into account. Therefore, organizations adopt environmental practices to gain a competitive advantage.

Several authors have stated the organizational benefits of an organization by targeting environmental performance. They are: (1) access

to environmentally aware consumers by exploring environmental marketing strategies [25] (2) the possibility of exporting production to countries with stricter environmental legislation than the organization's native country [26] (3) increase the value of organization's shares [27] (4) gain the economic advantage by improving green image of the organization [28] (5) reduce the amount of money spent on environmental fines [29] and (6) innovation in products and processes which increase environmental concern of organization [30].

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Company Profile

This study is carried out in one of the leading apparel company in Sri Lanka. This company employ over 47,000 associates across 42 manufacturing locations in Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh. In Sri Lanka, there were 32 factories operates by this company across the country. This company highly contributes to the Sri Lankan exported income. In this regard, this company has selected and awarded as the best exporter and highest net foreign exchange earner by the Sri Lankan export development board in 2016. Further, this company highly contributes to reducing the unemployment problem in Sri Lanka by providing more jobs to the people. Therefore, this company considered as one of the highest employment providers in the country.

Further, this company is excellence in environmental protection and management. Hence, this company has pledged to ensure the environmental sustainability to adhering to relevant compliance requirements, obtains the competitive advantage and to fulfill the social as well as ethical responsibilities. Company is passionate about leaving behind a green footprint as its legacy to the future generations, sustainable environmental management practices underpin every aspect of their value chain. The company has been involved in promoting several environmentally sustainable practices in their manufacturing process.

This company strives to align the environmental sustainability agenda to the guidelines set out by international and local organizations, such as United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) US Green Building Council and Central Environmental Authority. In this regard, this company received several green awards. This

company has received two LEED gold awards and one LEED platinum award. It's considered as the one of the biggest environmental achievements of this company. It is the world first apparel manufacturing facility which received ISO: 9001 (Energy Management Systems Certification). By considering the environmental concern, this company has selected to carry out this study.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis Methods

This study was an exploratory type of research because it was undertaken to identify and explore the sustainable environmental management practices of leading apparel company in Sri Lanka. In order to achieve the objectives of this study, secondary data were collected mainly from the published sustainability reports of the selected apparel company for the last two years (2013/2014 and 2014/2015). This company has reported several environmental practices in their sustainability reports. Hence, researchers have identified environmental practices through the published sustainability reports of the company. The collected data were analyzed by using systematic content analysis. The main theme or content of this exploration was the "Environmental Management Practice". The identified practices were classified and reported under the three categories. They are (1) Energy conservation-related practices, (2) Water conservation-related practices and (3) Earth conservation-related practices. By using systematic content analysis, researcher has developed Exhibits 1to 3, in order to show environmental practices of selected leading apparel company in Sri Lanka.

Further, researchers employed the observation method to confirm whether this company is really carrying out the environmental practices which were reported in their sustainability reports or not. There is an unstructured observation was conducted in the two factories of the selected leading apparel company which is situated in Batticaloa and Polonnaruwa areas of Sri Lanka for three working days. Observation offers the opportunity to record and analyze behavior and interactions as they occur, although not as a member of the study population. This allows events, actions and experiences and so on, to be seen through the eyes of the researcher, often without any construction on the part of those involved. It is a particularly useful approach when a study is concerned with investigating a process involving several players, where an understanding of non-verbal communications is

likely to be important or where the behavioural consequences of events form a focal point of study. Further, observation is a useful method to provide depth results. Through, observation researcher identified the valuable and meaningful environmental practices and initiatives which were adapted by this company. In order to check the actual practising of reported environmental practices of the company, observed environmental practices also categorized as energy conservation-related practices, water conservation-related practices and earth conservation-related practices.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This company is highly committed to environmental protection and management in order to reduce the ecological footprint of the company. Hence, this company is implementing several environmental practices and initiatives to achieve the environmental goals of the company. It is possible to identify several environmental practices of the company through the sustainability reports. The identified environmental practices are categorized as energy conservation-related practices, water conservation-related practices and earth conservation-related practices. Researchers have developed Exhibits 1 to 3, in order to show environmental practices of surveyed company.

In addition to that, researchers also present the energy conservation-related practices, water

conservation-related practices and earth conservation-related practices which were identified through observation method. And, discuss whether this company really carrying out the practices which were reported in their sustainability reports or not.

4.1 Observed Energy Conservation Related Practices

Efficient energy consumption is considered as the key factor to determine the environmental performance of the organization. In this regard, company applies the green technologies to reduce the energy consumption of the company. The building of the factory allows using the natural light and air instead of using the fans, air conditions and lights. The green environment is created in the factory by maintained the gardens. Further, company had been fitted the light emitting diode (LED) task lights and energy efficient air conditions. These energy efficient initiatives are really fruitful in reducing the electricity usage of the company up to certain level and creating the pleasant and healthy work environment to the employees.

The international energy outlook has predicted that non-renewable of energy such as fossil fuels, coal, oil and etc have the shelf life of 150 years. Therefore, organizations seriously consider about reducing energy consumption to save the energy for future generations. This company concerned with the practice of mass transportation in order to focus on exclusively on energy management aspects of the company. It

Exhibit 1: Energy conservation related practices

1. Retrofitting T8 fluorescent lamps with LED lamps (Light emitting diodes) and T5 fluorescent lamps.
2. Harvesting natural light via skylights.
3. Controlling lighting automatically with occupancy and lux sensors.
4. Using low power consuming task lights at needle point.
5. Using water-cooled central air conditioning systems.
6. The insulation of air conditioned buildings was improved through high quality roof insulation and door and window gap insulations, which are inspected regularly.
7. Conducting frequent leak detection programmes.
8. Optimizing the compressed air distribution system.
9. Switching the fuel source from furnace oil to bio mass.
10. Recovering clutch motors with servo motors.
11. Conducting life cycle analyses of prospective machines.
12. Equipping factories with building management system.
13. To optimize resource usage by automatically controlling chillers, lights and indoor air quality.
14. Provide transport for most employees as mass transport.
15. Offer high rates for newer vehicles, which are more environmentally friendly.
16. Installing the GPS device in the vehicles to track the route and reduce the kilometer.

is valuable initiation and practice to reduce the carbon emission of the company. There are above 500 employees work in the factory. Through this practice organization limited the practice of individual transportation of employees which turns leads to high level fuel consumption. Even, top level employees also use the mass transportation facility of the company for travelling. It will be an encouragement to other employees to adapt the mass transportation facility to reduce the negative impacts of the company. This practice also considered as a welfare facility to the employee. Overall, this practice provides a solution to the economic and environmental challenges of the company. Electronic communication practice also adapted by the company to reduces the fuel consumption by limiting the transportation. Head office of the company situated in the capital of Sri Lanka and branches of the company take place in several areas of Sri Lanka. Hence, this company is using the video conference method to conduct the meetings. Through the video conference method, head office easily communicates with the branches as well as branches also communicate without head office without traveling to the places. Indeed, this practice highly contributes to reducing the energy conservation of the company by reducing the transportation of the employees. It is also possible to improve the economic performance of the company by reduces the traveling, accommodation and other costs which arise while conducting the meeting in the head office. Further, this practice also fruitful to the employees in save the time of travelling as well as improve the work life balance of employees. Further, the manufacturing process of the company is closely supervised by the quality inspectors to reduce the output of defective clothes. If any mistake arises they want to manufacture new clothes instead of defective clothes. This practice leads to the high level energy consumption. This company reduces energy consumption by reducing defective clothes through the quality supervision. Further, these factories are producing the solar energy and selling it to the Ceylon Electricity Board. Through these factories mitigating the negative environmental impact and improving the positive environmental impact as well as reducing the electricity cost. This practice also considered as the one of the social responsible environmental activity of this company.

Beyond that, this company is clearly communicating the energy saving policy and energy saving practices to the employees to

adopt best practices in this regard. In an organizational context, without employees' active participation and commitment, improving energy management becomes unrealistic. Indeed, employees who are better acquainted with companies' practices and policies are more likely to contribute to their organization sustainability programmes [31]. Hence, the organization should focus on improving the employees' environmental knowledge, skills, awareness as well as positive environmental attitudes and behaviors to actively participate in the energy management practices to protect the environment. Organizations have the huge responsibility to motivate the employees to behave in environmental friendly manner within the organization to safeguard the environment. Thus, this organization provides the adequate information in their native language to carry out what the management expect to do and what employees should do during their works to reduce energy consumption and wastage. In this organization, there are many environmental awareness notices and instructions displayed in the workplace to promote the environmental responsibility of the employees.

In each and every rooms of the company, we can notice the reminders in the doors which command the employees to switch off the lights, fans and air conditions (AC) when they leave from the rooms. We can also observe the instructions in the computers' screen savers which reminded the employee to shut down the computer after finishing their work. These practices are the meaningful practices to reduce the electricity usage of the company. In most of the workplaces, lights, fans and air conditions are working without any purpose. This is happening mostly due to the careless of the workers. Even the environmental oriented employees also forget to do those things because of their busy work schedule and work tensions. Hence, these commands remind the employees to carry out these activities. These posters and commands highly contribute to enriching the environmental knowledge of the employees to shape the environmental attitudes of the employees. In long term its leads to promote energy-saving behaviors among the employees of the company and create good environmental culture in the company. Nowadays, organizations are providing environmental related training to the employees to enhance the environmental orientation of the organization. This information related practices are considered as the mediator mechanism to transfer of training into practice. Based on the

above evidences, it is possible to conclude that surveyed company is paying a great attention on energy management and practicing the energy conservation practices which were reported in their sustainability reports.

4.2 Observed Water Conservation Related Practices

Company is endeavoring to reduce water wastage within the company to achieve the goal of water sustainability. For this purpose, this company has invested more money to establish water management system within the factories. It is possible to reduce wastage of water in a high level through the water management system. Energy efficient push taps are fitted to reduce unnecessary water wastage. Further, toilets are equipped with the water-efficient flush buttons which limited water consumption. These water-efficient equipment are useful to reduce the water wastage which was arising from the careless of the employees. Water saving posters has displayed in the water usage areas to constantly remind the employees to foster the environmental behaviours to save the water. In addition, employees have appointed to check the leakages to prevent from unwanted water wastages. Company has the practice of recycling waste water for the use of gardening. And also arrangement has been made for harvesting the rainwater. Through the observation, researchers confirmed that, company is actually practicing the water conservation practices which were reported in their sustainability reports.

4.3 Observed Earth Conservation Related Practices

The company is adapting the several practices to reduce the negative environmental impact and increase the positive environmental impact on earth. In this regard, surveyed company is implementing many practices to reduce the paper usage and wastage. It is possible observe that, employee records and other company records are recorded in the format of e-documents. And also company engaged with the practice of printing doubled in order to reduce the paper usage. Paper usage of the factory is carefully observed by the factory top management. In this regard, each and every department should get the factory top management approval to get the paper bundles. This practice is highly useful to reduce the unnecessary paper usage and wastage which really supports to create the green factory. Further, this company is considering more about waste management. We can observe the colour coded bins in several places to collect the waste generated in this factory. The employees are advised by the visual aids to put the waste in to the bins according to waste category. It is help to evaluate the waste generated in the factory and take necessary steps reduce the amount of waste. Further, this company is selling each category of waste to the relevant suppliers in order to reuse. For example, woven off-cuts are sold to cement factories to reuse.

This company also concerned with food waste management which becoming the one of the

Exhibit 2: Water conservation related practices

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1. Avoid the use of clean drinking water in process where high quality water is not required.
 2. Reduce the quality of water required for the process by installing new installing new equipment and upgrading outdated equipment (eg, Water efficient push taps).
 3. Reuse water –water discharged at one point in the process may be used another point without requiring any treatment.
 4. Recycle water to be used for gardening purposes, toilet flushing or as the process water.
 5. Treat all water used in the factory either biologically or chemically and discharge treated water into inland surface water, if cannot be recycled.
 6. Leak detections are carried out periodically in each factory and also through audits to reduce the water wastage.
 7. Campaigns have been carried out to share the knowledge on the importance of water conservation to the employees.
 8. Public areas such as toilet and canteens have water saving posters, to constantly reminded employees to save the water.
 9. Increasing the use of green water sources through rainwater harvesting.
 10. Eliminate the hazardous chemicals from discharged water.
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Exhibit 3: Earth conservation related practices

1. Recycling woven off-cuts for glove protection.
 2. Recycling Knit off-cuts for the protection of socks, under carpets and wet wipes.
 3. Reusing as kitchen napkins and hand wipes in the cafeteria or toilets.
 4. Printing double-sided.
 5. Using e-mail memos instead of leaving notes.
 6. Reusing paper as scarp paper.
 7. Reusing shredded paper for packing.
 8. Requesting the supplier to use less packaging and reuse packing where possible.
 9. Reusing boxes for outgoing deliveries.
 10. Reusing thread cones.
 11. Partnering with a third party to recycle paper, cardboard and plastics.
 12. Monitoring food waste on monthly basis.
 13. Conducting an awareness programme to encourage the reduction of food waste.
 14. Reusing food waste at local piggeries.
 15. Recycling organic waste to produce biogas and for composting.
 16. Selling metal scraps to local buyers for recycling.
 17. Replacing all CFL with LEDs.
 18. Partnering with a third party for sale disposal of CFLs.
 19. Partnering with a third party to recycle glass waste.
 20. Encouraging practices to increase the life span of electronic devices.
 21. Partnering with a third party to reuse machine oil.
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serious issues in the world. It is possible observe the several environmental practices and initiatives of the company which were intended to reduce the food wastage. The company has the practice of provides the food to the employees. This practice significantly contributes to prohibit the paper and polythene usage within the company through bringing the food from outside. Further, canteens have the posters to give the awareness regarding food wastage. And also previous day food wastage displayed in the canteens. By adopting these practices, organization give awareness and knowledge to the employees to promote their environmental behaviours to reduce the food wastage. Food dust bins were established in the canteens to collected and evaluate food wastages arisen in the factories. This practice also contributes to reduce the food wastage by find out which types of foods highly contributes food wastage and change the food menu according to the food waste records. In long term, these effective food management practices contribute to achieve the objective of zero level food wastage within the company. Through the observation, it is possible confirm that, surveyed company really practicing earth conservation practices which were reported in their sustainability reports.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 sustainability reports of selected apparel

company, researchers have identified certain sustainable environmental practices. Identified sustainable environmental practices categorized as energy conservation related practices, water conservation related practices and earth conservation related practices. Further, findings of study confirmed that, company really practicing all the environmental practices which were reported in the sustainability reports of the organization. Moreover, it should be put forward, that the organization that researcher has chosen for this study, truly involves in eco-friendly implementation system, and the ethics of environmental preservation is highly considered while neglecting the green washing process. This types of environmental practices and initiatives are highly contributing in make operations as well as organizations green. Environmental awareness, environmental knowledge, positive environmental attitudes and behaviors, and environmental responsibility of employees can be shaped through adaption of these environmental initiatives and practices. Further, these practices are fruitful to transform the normal employees in to green employees to reduce the negative impact on environment as well as improve the positive environmental impact to achieve the environmental goals of the organization. Organizations can materialize the environmental strategies policies through the implementation of valuable environmental initiatives and practices. Hence, researcher suggested that organizations consider more about plan and implement

innovative environmental initiatives and practices to enhance the environmental performance.

Although, this company implements several environmental practices and initiatives, organization should focus more on providing the environmental training to the employees in order to improve their environmental knowledge, skills and attitude as well as mindset. Because, employees are the key stakeholders in determine the success of the environmental management system of the organization [32]. It is possible to observe that, most of the employees in the factories were not understand the purpose of implementing certain environmental practices. Thus, this company should pay a great attention on conducting the environmental training, especially to the low level employees to further enhance their environmental performance.

This study should be of both theoretical and practical significance. From the theoretical perspective, the results are expected contribute to corporate environmental management. From the practical perspective, we believe the results will help to improve the environmental performance of organization among practitioners. In other words, the empirical findings should help the practitioners to understand the actual environmental practices which are practice by the organizations to improve the environmental performance. Further, this study fills the methodological gap in the environmental management research area.

DISCLAIMER

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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